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"He Cometh Not," She Said.

BY ANNIE THOMAS.

CHAPTER I.

MADGE RODEN.

THE village lies partly in a shady, hot hollow, and partly on a breezy slope that is inclining away to the grand ridges of Exmoor. From some wild deep spring up in those purple heights a river takes its rise, and, after tearing tumultuously through this village of Halsworthy, pours itself a passionate offering into the sea that is lashing the cliffs out yonder.

It is July—rich, sumptuous July. The year has "grown lush in juicy stalks," and the bees are everywhere keeping up a hum about the globes of clover and the waxy-looking, pale-pink heath that blooms abundantly here. The land is wreathed with flowers, in short; for the soil is fertile, and the love of flowers is strong in this locality.

Soft torpor is the normal characteristic of that portion of Halsworthy which nestles away in the hollow. But to-day unwonted excitement, not to say agitation, reigns there. Halsworthy is about to compete with the great world of which it knows so little in the matter of pleasure. It is going to start a cricket, croquet, and archery club; and it is going to commence proceedings to-day.

There is one name on the tongue of every man, woman and child in Halsworthy to-day, and that is the name of Miss Roden. The girl finds that life lags more than

a little in this sweet, sleepy hollow; and so, in her impatience of this lagging, she has at last incited Halsworthy to bestir itself in the matter of amusement.

She had given up the lawn that stretches away in front of her own picturesque, many-gabled house as the ground for the sports. And now she is standing on the steps just outside the porch, watching them decorate the

tent that is to be called a "pavilion," and to be the scene of a "*the dansant*," with evergreens and purple heather.

She was born and has grown up in this free, invigorating moorland air, and now at twenty she is as full of health and spirit and fearlessness as an Exmoor pony. There is a strong bewitching element of untamed, untrained grace about her, as she suddenly jumps off the

steps and walks quickly, without the faintest indication of Grecian bend, to meet a lady who is slowly coming up the drive.

She wears a dress of some thick, white material, cut just short enough in front to show her small, shapely feet. The tone of color of any thick, white material is enough to ruin the fairest complexion; but, though Madge Roden is never called "fair," it does not ruin hers. Her round, straight throat does not look brown, rising even from the collar of such a dress. And as for her face, few people care to criticise the color of a countenance that is bright, merry, and frank as a gratified child's. The roundness of youth has not left her cheeks yet. Her eyes have not learned to drop or lower themselves. She gives back look for look without blushing. Indeed, altogether the bloom is very much on this beautiful peach—this girl on whom no rays that scorch have ever been allowed to fall.

The lady whom she meets a little way down the drive takes her hand, holds her at arm's length, and scans her criticisingly. When the inspection is over, she says:

"You will do very well,



"IT COSTS YOU VERY LITTLE TO TURN DOWN THIS PAGE IN THE BOOK OF YOUR LIFE FOREVER, APPARENTLY," SAID PHILIP, BITTERLY.

Madge. I like your rose-colored ribbons and rather."

"I tried a dozen colors at least before I settled on rose," Madge answers a trifle repiningly, "and then I felt after all, Who will see me? Who will take the trouble to come to Halsworthy? Mrs. Henderson, do you think anyone will accept our challenges? do you think anyone will come?"

Mrs. Henderson is forty-five. She has a husband, children, a home, a round of duties that must be done, and a few anxieties. Nevertheless, she has the heart of a woman, and a great love and sympathy for Madge. So she says heartily:

"I hope so, dear—I think so. At any rate, your efforts won't be unrewarded, for you'll have given a great deal of pleasure to your old friends in the village; they will meet here and enjoy themselves even if no strangers come."

Madge has clasped her hands behind her back. There is a comic expression, half amused, half petulant, on her face. The light breeze that comes down from the hill has wafted a few stray locks of her bronze-brown hair away from the confining pins. Her small, oval, eager face is changing its expression every instant. Her lustrous velvet eyes are lifted, with a look in them that pleads for more sympathy, with her longing for a change, with her craving for something better than she has known. Altogether, though she is not a beauty, Madge Roden is a very attractive specimen of womankind as she stands here, about to play the part of young lady of the land for the first time.

She is an orphan, this girl who owns Moor-bridge House and lands; and though she has a brace of guardians, and an old aunt of her father lives with her, she is, to all intents and purposes, as free and unfettered as one of the uncaught Ex-moor ponies, to which I compared her just now. For three years she has done very much as she pleases with herself and her two thousand per annum. But her flights have been very circumscribed, and she is longing to try her wings.

All the fashion, youth, and beauty of Halsworthy arrive shortly after Mrs. Henderson. Halsworthy is not densely populated with the upper classes; but still it has its pair of surgeons, its lawyer, and its one retired gentleman who has realized fabulous sums in the city. These all have daughters who are delighted to shoot arrows in the air and play croquet. The sons of these respective families are out in the world, naturally, and Halsworthy knows them not.

Madge hurls herself into the task of entertaining her friends; and, aided by Mr. Henderson (the vicar) and his wife, her dear friend, she is succeeding, when a drag comes up, and the arrival of the "Incogniti," who are to play against the "Gentlemen of West Somerset," is proclaimed. Madge's heart thumps with joy. It is going to be a success, this enterprise of hers. If only the Gentlemen of West Somerset would be good enough to come, all would go merry as a marriage-bell.

They come at last. The first cricket-match of the week is played. The "the dansant" goes off in a way that makes it a sweet memory among the maidens of Halsworthy forever. And the veil of night descends upon enthusiastic pæans of praise and thanksgiving to Miss Roden, the originator of this holiday fete that has been so gloriously inaugurated. When that day's work is quite done, and the evil of forgetfulness cannot be remedied, a thought that would have been such a happy one if it had only flashed across Madge's mind in time, comes into it and tantalizes her. And in the act of saying good-night to Mrs. Henderson, she interrupts herself to cry out:

"Oh! why didn't you—why didn't you ask your friend's son—that Philip, you know? How could you forget him? and how could I?"

"How remiss—how stupid I am!" Mrs. Henderson is as sincerely sorry and mortified about this omission as Madge herself. "Never mind, Madge," she adds directly, "I'll write to-morrow; and if he can take a holiday, the good, hard-working fellow, he may be here by Wednesday, and enjoy three days of our jubilee."

After a long search Mrs. Henderson is rewarded by finding the last letter she has received from her old friend Mrs. Fletcher. They had been tender and true friends for thirty years; but life is too full of work for the great majority, for frequent

correspondence in these days. This letter is dated two years ago. The address given is Number 20 in one of the insignificant streets in Chelsea, that do not dare to call themselves a portion of Belgravia. Mrs. Henderson reads the letter over again with interest as keen and fresh as when she received it. It is full of the praises of Philip—of the good son and brother, whose quiet, unvaunted heroism wins a blessing from his mother every hour of his life.

Presently she gives a pleased shake of the head, and a well-satisfied smile, and says:

"I am justified. A man who has given up a career he loved, as Philip loved the Bar, and has settled down so uncomplainingly to an occupation he must nearly loathe, for his mother's sake, must deserve even my child Madge. I'll ask him down: even his goodness will have its reward, if he wins her for his wife."

So she sits down and writes to Mrs. Fletcher this night, tired as she is, and pleads the cause of the Halsworthy sports and pastimes so cleverly, that it seems as if Philip would be conferring a favor on everyone by coming to be a guest at the Vicarage for so long a time as he can take a holiday. And so the first link in the chain of complications which will ensue is forged by one of the kindest, truest hands in the world.

* * * * *

For the first time for the day, the temperature of the front sitting-room in the little house in which the Fletchers lived in Chelsea is pleasant, or rather endurable. It is the day after the inauguration of the Halsworthy sports and pastimes. The evening post is just in, and Mrs. Fletcher—Philip's mother—is in receipt of a letter from her old friend Mrs. Henderson.

Behold her as she sits there in the most comfortable chair in the room—a very old and feeble woman, though she only numbers fifty years. Like her son's, her nervous system is finely organized, and it has had some severe shocks from Fate and Fortune. There is a want of power about her muscles, a lack of physical force that makes her children shrink in pain from any mention of the word "paralysis"—although her incapacity for action and exertion has never been broadly called by that name yet.

Those children are about her now, as she finishes reading Mrs. Henderson's letter, and, tired with the effort, lets it feebly flutter to the floor. Philip, her son, is reading a newspaper. His occupation as head clerk in an important mercantile house does not leave him much time for even press-literature during the hours of the day.

He is a young man of eight-and-twenty, neither grave-looking nor endowed with a disappointed expression, though he has relinquished some hopes in life that have been—and still are—desperately dear to him. He has a power of happiness and enjoyment about him still. Looking at him as he sits there by his mother, his fair hair tossed off his open brow, his eyes sparkling with his keen sense of the humor of something that is only seen by himself, one feels inclined to endorse Mrs. Henderson's opinion, and declare that he does deserve even such a one as her favorite, the heiress, Madge Roden.

His two sisters, "the girls" as they are called still, though one is twenty-seven and the other twenty-five, are hovering about full of suggestions.

"You might manage it so easily, surely, Phil. Get Roberts to take your work for a week, and give your pupils papers; the holiday would do you so much good."

"And to feel you were having a holiday would do mamma so much good," the younger sister pleads. "Chrissy and I would never let her miss you, would we, Chriss?"

"Chriss, a determined, good, practical, hard-headed, pretty woman of twenty-seven, takes careful stock of all the possibilities before she answers."

"Mamma won't miss him very much if Cousin Philip staid here with us while Phil was away; the change to Phil would do her good, wouldn't it, mamma?"

"And Cousin Phillip is entirely at your service, now and forever," a refined, full-toned voice says, as a man lounges forward from the darkest corner of the room, and shows himself in the gleam

of light that still comes in at the window, without any dread of that light being too fierce for him.

The two girls, Chrissy and Mabel, look at him admiringly, rapturously, gratefully. Philip Fletcher, their own good, true, thoroughly appreciated brother, is cast in a model that is very agreeable in the eyes of young womankind. But this cousin of his is just so much taller, handsomer, finer in every way as forces one to see the difference, even when one does not want to mark it. He is quite as clever, too, as Phil—quite as ambitious, quite as attractive. But he lacks all that patient, gallant spirit of self-abnegation which has made Phil sacrifice himself to his mother's real tangible comfort. He lacks all the self-control, all the plodding perseverance, all the higher elements of Phil's nature.

But he is very attractive, very bewildering, very greatly gifted with the power of seeming, and the women are all bewitched by him. Even his old aunt feels as if she could blush with pleasure, when she hears him say that he will willingly stay and play Phil's part in the household, while Phil goes down to Halsworthy to play croquet and cricket, and to make the acquaintance of Mrs. Henderson's dear child, Madge Roden.

"Though why that young person should be held out as a bait in these days of strikes, and high prices, and general inability to marry and be happy on nothing a year, is incomprehensible to me," he says.

And then he learns for a certainty that Miss Roden has two thousand per annum.

It is a dreadful disappointment to the mother, to the sisters (and to the cousin, he himself affirms), but later that night Phil Fletcher comes to the conclusion that he "can't go to Halsworthy." Another pupil is looming on his horizon. The senior partner of his house wants to get away to Switzerland early this year. He "doesn't see his way out of it all till September," he says; and then he kisses his mother and adds:

"One of the girls must write and tell Mrs. Henderson this as politely as possible, mother. A good thing, too: her child, as she calls this Madge Roden, might entangle herself in my life, and she must fly higher."

The girls have a very full portion of work allotted to them already, in spite of all Phil's efforts to smooth their paths. Chrissy keeps the house, and does daily battle with butcher and baker; to say nothing of the hourly combat that goes on between mind and matter, the former being represented by herself, the latter by the cook and house-maid. Chrissy's time is very fully occupied. She always feels as if so much ground were cut from beneath her feet, when she has to sit down to write a letter. And Mabel, the younger sister, is striving to be independent of "dear, noble, hark-working Phil." She gives music-lessons from ten till four, and after four, well! she is not inclined to rush into a correspondence with a woman who is to her only "mamma's old friend Mrs. Henderson."

But Cousin Philip, the handsomest idler about town, of whom utter ruin has been prognosticated by discerning friends a hundred times or more—Cousin Philip, the irresistible scamp of the Fletcher family, comes to the fore on this occasion in a most unprecedented way.

He will write and explain (in his aunt's name) to Mrs. Henderson that his cousin has no time for Halsworthy, and all the happiness that Halsworthy might represent to him. He (in his aunt's name) undertakes to make the refusal a more gracious thing than the acceptance of the invitation would have been. He (in his aunt's name) will take care that Phil's conduct shall shine out more gloriously than ever in Mrs. Henderson's eyes.

Thus much he declares to the mother and the sisters. To his cousin Phil he simply says:

"I'll put it all so neatly, old fellow, that you will be able to step into that hospitable Hendersonian home at any time. Look here, Phil, my opinion is not worth much, I'm aware. I'm rather of the vagabond order, I know. But you are right not to fall into a silk net yet; work, work, is the thing for us both. I am off to-morrow, to try to shift for myself at last."

As he utters this virtuous resolve, he rises and holds out his hand, and Phil grasps it, opening his mouth in amazement the while.

"You work!" he ejaculates.

"Yes, I'm going in for the hardest work I've ever done in my life. Shake hands, old boy, and say good-bye to your mother and sisters for me."

Phil Fletcher hears a pupil in the hall; he has no time to be astonished at his cousin's determination. He says rapidly, as he is arranging his papers for the evening:

"I hope you put it smoothly to Mrs. Henderson: she may be a useful friend to the girls. I wish she'd give them the chance of a holiday there; but it's as likely as not that we don't hear of her for another half century."

"As likely as not," Cousin Philip rejoins. Then he says good-bye once more, rather brokenly, and goes and kisses his aunt and bids the girls farewell.

For all these arrangements a fresh impetus is given to the Halsworthy hilarities on Wednesday night by the introduction of Mr. Philip Fletcher.

Mrs. Henderson takes him up to Moorbridge House herself, and specially presents him to the young presiding deity. "He's his mother's son, dear—that's the only claim he has on my regard," she whispers to Madge; but she adds, as Madge is turning away:

"He's as good as he's good-looking, dear; I dare venture to tell you that. This holiday is the first he has had for years, and he half repents having taken it now. My own girls are darlings, but I do envy my old friend that son."

"Yet he isn't quite what I expected to see," Madge says, a little wistfully; "he's so handsome, and his goodness sits so easily upon him. His sisters must like him very much. And how good of you to get him! for I have so many young girls to think of, haven't I?"

This from the fair *châtelaine* of twenty. Surely Philip Fletcher's lines are cast in pleasant places!

CHAPTER II.

OLIVE AVELAND'S ERROR.

THE Thursday following Philip Fletcher's arrival is the best, brightest and most beautiful day of the Halsworthy week so far. The houses of all the clergy and gentry, for ten miles round, are filled with guests, and these, together with their entertainers, flock to the lawn of the head-centre of all this gaiety, Miss Roden herself.

Her friends from the Vicarage are with her very early, and Madge soon finds herself consulting Mr. Fletcher rather humbly about many things over which she had assumed the sole control before he came. For a man whose whole grown-up life has been given to engrossing business (engrossing though distasteful), he is surprisingly well up in all that pertains to athletic sports, pastimes, amusements of every kind. "And he doesn't vaunt his familiarity with them at all—it just seems to slip out against his will," Madge tells Mrs. Henderson towards the end of the day, when Philip has carried off the stranger's honors in a flat-race.

Old Miss Roden, the great-aunt who takes care of Madge, and manages (?) Moorbridge House (she really believes that she does both these things, thanks to Madge's tact and kind-heartedness), is out on the lawn in an arm-chair under the bright green sweeping branches of a deciduous cypress. All those visitors who are of sufficient note in the neighborhood have been presented to the lady who is in authority over pleasant Madge Roden. To Madge's great delight, her aunt is to invite a great number of people to finish the evening in Moorbridge House on this happy day.

"The young people can dance till twelve, and then we will have supper," she said, when she issued her invitations the day before to the happy many who have been chosen. And all this she has done of her own accord, and not at Madge's instigation.

Presently those who are to remain troop in joyfully, and every bed and dressing-room in spacious Moorbridge House is soon full of merry young people intent on making the best of themselves. Only Madge lingers out on the lawn still, saying a few more words to her friends, the Hendersons, who are going home to dress.

"Don't rely on my coming back, Madge," Mrs.

Henderson says. "I'm but a weak mortal, and the temptation to stay at home and be cool and comfortable all the evening may overcome me."

"Fancy anyone abstaining from dancing!" Madge says, pityingly, as they saunter slowly toward the entrance-gate. "I'm tired, now; if I'd nothing to look forward to, my feet would ache horribly, and I should be asleep in two minutes; but, as it is, my feet are only throbbing to dance, and I do wonder at your thinking of coolness and comfort and home, when you have an opportunity of flying round double time to Olive Aveland's playing."

The four are walking abreast as Madge says this, and Mrs. Henderson answers:

"You dear, exhaustingly, unfatigued person, you had better go in and dress now, or you'll be a laggard hostess—as bad a thing in a woman as it is for a man to be a laggard in love or war; isn't it, Philip?"

The vicar's wife turns kindly to include her old friend's son in the conversation; and as her eyes fall on him, she exclaims: "Philip, you have overdone yourself to-day," for Philip Fletcher seems to be almost staggering as he walks.

"Yes," he says, rather faintly, "this sudden burst after my sedentary life—it tries a fellow; and you were right, Miss Roden; when that ball struck my foot, it gave me a harder blow than I confessed to."

"Oh!" Madge cries, full of a feeling that is half pity for him, and half fear that this handsome young stranger may not be able to dance all the round dances with his lame foot. "Oh! do come into the house, and have your things sent up; do save yourself the walk; he must, mustn't he, Mrs. Henderson?"

"It would be wise to do it," both the Hendersons tell him; but his foot gets instantaneously better, and he insists on going back to the Vicarage; and Madge at last goes in to dress with a feeling that it will be a great blow to the beauty of this entertainment of theirs, if the flower of the manhood here assembled must be a wall-flower.

Madge is no laggard. In clouds of rose-colored gauze that shade away to white nearly, she is springing down the stairs before any of the guest-chambers give forth their renovated occupants. All the walls of Moorbridge House are paneled with finely veined and polished wood, that was cut on the estate two centuries ago. It is all sombre and superb; but the bright young figure, that glances from room to room so swiftly, seems to make it all radiant at once.

Flowers droop in hanging baskets from every corner and every ceiling. Flowers on pedestals, in pyramids, on brackets, render every available corner gorgeous and fragrant. But not a bloom there is sweeter, brighter, or purer than the girl who owns them all—the frank-faced, light-hearted, pleasure-loving little heiress.

Suddenly there comes toward this Queen Rose of the rose-bud garden of girls a glorious contrast to her, in the form of as perfect an Amber Witch as the eyes of men have ever beheld. The two figures increase their speed as they approach one another. The rose-colored gauze floats over the folds of an amber-hued silk; the round clear-complexioned cheek of bonnie Madge is pressed by the crimson lips and the ivory-white cheek of a tall, dark, lissom-figured girl, whose movements are supple and seductive as a serpent's.

"You dear Olive, to have come, after all; isn't this all jolly!" Madge (who has not been trained down to be reticent on the subject of the charms of her own house) exclaims:

"It's all very delightful, Madge," the new-comer says, carelessly; "but you know that I think it a pity that all these people should be coming in to spoil it: I hate these gatherings!"

She says these last words with such an increase of force and emphasis as proves that she means them. She gives an impatient gesture, too, and sits down abruptly on a sofa, and twists a bracelet round her arm roughly.

"It's so good of you to have come, as you do hate it all so," Madge says, ruefully; no one plays as you do, and I should have been obliged to give up dancing myself and strum for them, if you hadn't been so kind; but I shall feel so selfish if you don't seem to enjoy it all."

Olive Aveland laughs a little contemptuously.

"Even you can't work a miracle, Madge; but I'll tell you this for your comfort, dear. If I sit with my back to the congregation and my face to the piano all the evening, and you keep people from speaking to me, I shall be as happy here as I should have been in Mrs. Wilmot's school-room."

"I can't keep them from speaking to you; and why should I, when everyone admires you so, and longs to be introduced to you?"

"Tell them that I'm Mrs. Wilmot's governess," Olive interrupts; "say that there's something suspicious about the way I refuse to speak about my life before I came here; say what you like, only save me from being beset by anyone."

She is unquestionably a handsome, high-bred looking girl, this one who rises up now trembling a little from the effects of the vehemence with which she has spoken. A dark-haired handsome girl, with a pale face that tells falsehoods if its owner has not suffered a wealth of disappointment and sorrow in her time, however easily the world may be wagging with her now. There is a good deal of something that is not, perhaps, absolute defiance in her manner and expression. It is not absolute defiance. It is more a conviction that she will shortly be attacked, and an impatient readiness to defend herself. But people who are not given to drawing delicate distinctions between attributes which differ greatly, though on the surface they resemble one another slightly, fall into the error of fancying her largely endowed with the quality of defiance, and a rather presuming person altogether for her position.

As she stands now, still playing with the bracelet that clasps her tender arm, with a half-averted face, and a well-developed expression of "not wishing to be one of them," as Madge and old Miss Roden receive the friends who come trooping in, more than one glance falls upon her with pronounced, compelled admiration. She would ornament any room—any station—any age! For she has not only beauty, but style and cultivation.

And yet she is only "the governess" in Mrs. Wilmot's family, and Mrs. Wilmot is the wife of a quick-brained, purse-proud solicitor, who tells Olive every day that "she's handsome enough to pick and choose something better than a pauper parson." And yet she has not the option of "picking and choosing" as he declares, for with all her beauty and her looks of breed, men do not go down before her as the few who have seen Madge Roden already have gone down before that bright young person.

She is only the governess of Mrs. Wilmot's; and to-night she is here to play the piano without intermission, while a score of girls who can't hold a candle to her whirl and frisk about in the waltzes and gallops. It is a wayward fate hers. But wayward as it is, there is something in her face and bearing that hints even to a casual observer that she can battle with it. And wayward as it is, at this moment when we meet with her first, she would not change it for "any other that she can think of." This is the way she words her dissatisfied contentedness to herself as she superciliously surveys the society that comes joyously trooping into Madge Roden's drawing-room.

By-and-by, after half a hundred jubilant ejaculations of satisfaction that mean nothing at all, Madge the rose-colored and socially appointed Success, finds herself close to that Ambre witch whose witchcraft has never won her a good reward yet. And Madge says exultantly:

"You'll have to come out of your stronghold of indifference to everything directly, Olive; Mrs. Henderson is going to bring a young man! Imagine a young man at Moorbridge House."

"Brought men are never nice," Olive says, calmly twiddling her onyx bracelets; "but anything that appears under Mrs. Henderson's auspices must be rather better than the rest of the world. What is she going to bring?"

"You call him 'anything' and 'what,'" Madge says, rapidly; "but when you see him you'll like him—I do."

Olive—the recipient of this annunciation—tries to laugh lightly—tries to seem to listen—tries to run her fingers over the keys carelessly, and fails in doing all these things, she is so miserably uninterested in the young man who is to appear under Mrs. Henderson's auspices.

The fact is that the poor girl, for all her defiant aspect and eighteen-shilling-a-yard silk, is distraught by a pettifogging anxiety. What ought she to give to that glib, lissom maid of Madge's who pulled out the train of her amber silk for her, and adjusted one contumacious tress of silky dusky hair? And further, what a wretched cold she will catch, and how the night dews will ruin her dress if the Wilmots send the open square cart for her.

"What's he called?" she asks vaguely, in reference to that last remark of Madge's. And Madge says, as she sails away on a moderately good partner's arm.

"Oh! didn't I tell you—Philip Fletcher!"

It would be evident to everyone in the room, if Miss Aveland's face was only turned roomward, that something in the sound of that name strikes upon her strongly. But whether pleasantly or unpleasantly it is difficult to tell. However, her position at the piano saves her—mercifully saves her—from any scrutiny. And, as she goes on playing as cleverly as ever, her emotion passes unobserved.

Then comes a lull presently. Girls who have partners wander into the room where refreshments await them. Girls who are without partners, but who are also hot and thirsty try to look as if they had no tantalizing thought of the iced Champagne and water their luckier compeers are drinking. At this juncture Olive, who has regained her composure, turns round and looks steadily round the room.

Mrs. Henderson is just coming in. Kindly, clever, trustworthy Mrs. Henderson; the one matron in the district who had the power of melting away a portion of Olive's reserve. She comes in alone, and Olive experiences a bitter sense of disappointment, very much to her own annoyance. Her first question, as Mrs. Henderson shakes hands with her, is:

"Are you here alone?"

"Yes; unfortunately our visitor injured his ankle this morning; my husband is staying with him."

"Madge Roden will be sorry, she expected a Mr. Philip Fletcher," Olive says, venturing to pronounce the name that has the sweetest, saddest sound in the world to her.

"Yes, I must look for her and tell my bad news. I wish he had been here; even you would have admitted that he is a Triton among minnows." Then, half laughing at herself the while, Mrs. Henderson goes on to say: "You'll soon find out that he is my weak point, Olive; I loved him dearly for his mother's sake, before I knew him, now I love him nearly as well as I do Madge; my old friend has known tribulation enough, but she is recompensed for everything by the devotion of such a son as Phil."

Olive, in the midst of a sudden, crushing revulsion of feeling, grasps this fact—namely, that she has made a mistake, and that the Philip Fletcher she has been half hoping, half fearing, to see is not the one who is staying at Mrs. Henderson's. The Philip Fletcher who made life a howling wilderness for her for awhile had no living mother to have her heart stabbed by his conduct.

The girl, with unwonted pertinacity and very much to Mrs. Henderson's surprise, makes one further effort to clear up this point.

"I knew something of a Mr. Philip Fletcher once," she says; "the name struck me curiously just now; the one I mean had no regular profession, and very few friends, he told us."

"That must have been his cousin—unluckily my Phil has a cousin who bears the same name; your description carries out what I have heard of him; he has no profession, and he does not deserve to have many friends; he is a clever, worthless"

"Don't abuse him," Olive exclaims, angrily; "he is all you say, and worse perhaps, but don't abuse him."

And then Mrs. Henderson guesses how it has been with the girl who has been so conspicuously reserved about her past life. Guesses how it has been, and pities her for such being, but at the same time feels a little annoyed at Olive's having confused the identity of the two cousins even in ignorance.

The dancing goes on merrily enough with the

majority, but Madge Roden is unfeignedly, openly, heartily sorry, for the absence of the handsome stranger who is such a brilliant and attractive man of the world in comparison with anyone who has hitherto been seen among these Exmoor hills. And old associations roused by the name overpower Olive to the extent of making her strike several wrong notes. His cousin must know something of the welfare and the whereabouts of that once well-loved black sheep. She will hear of him again. And "Oh!" she prays, "may it be something good at last."

As she drives home this night in the Wilmot's square cart, she thinks of one drive she had on just such another night, five years ago, with Philip Fletcher opposite to her, and her hand clasped by his. Some of the words he whispered then ring mockingly in her ears now, and she recalls with frightful fidelity the exultant throb of bliss that her heart gave when he pleaded to "see her the next day to ask her to be—" the closer pressure of the hand said more to her than any spoken words could have said.

Of course she did not give him the permission, and of course he came, and saw, and wooed, and won her.

She was living with her uncle and aunt then, and they were rich people who surrounded their beautiful orphan niece with all imaginable luxury, and expected to be repaid for it, by her making a good marriage. Then ensued a brief season of proud love and happiness, and faith in Philip Fletcher—a period of praying to her uncle and aunt to believe in him, to take his version of his life as gospel truth, to give her to him, and treat her as their own child still. And when her prayers were granted, and they were about to realize their wishes, then ensued a period of such anguish and humiliation as she shudders even now to think of. He proved false and a fool at the same time; he broke off his engagement to Olive Aveland, gambled for higher stakes, proposed to a richer girl, and was refused, for Olive's story was known.

She had been an ardent, impulsive girl in those days, and had shown her love for her handsome, adoring young lover very openly. So when she had the letter, in which he told her that he had "made a vow to crush the love which could never make them happy, out of her heart,—it had never existed in his own," she thought it a hoax—a vile, vulgar jest. But when he never came, when other tongues told the truth to her relations, she could not keep her miserable young heart up with that hope any longer. Whatever the cause, the result was clear. He had jilted her—made her life a barren waste—been far more cruel than she had deemed it possible anyone could ever be to her.

Pride, dignity, self-respect all fled, and in the madness of her misery she wrote to him. "You either loved me, or you lied to me," she said; "if you don't want me to curse the day I listened and believed, write to me once, and say at least you loved me then. You have made the world a hell to me—but I love you still."

He was a prudent young man. The richer girl had not refused him then, and he had no desire for any stray documents to fall into her hands. There was no knowing what a rash, ardent creature like Olive might do. So he burned the letter and never answered it.

CHAPTER III.

THE FIRST AWAKENING.

It is the last day of the "Halsworthy Week" and Madge Roden is permitting herself to feel rather glad that "it is nearly over," this fete which she has organized, and which, from everybody's point of view, has been such a grand success. Madge has enjoyed it as much as anyone; still she tells her aunt that she "thinks the quiet will be delightful again."

She says this as she stands in her aunt's dressing-room; she has come in to say "Good-morning," previous to walking over to the vicarage to breakfast, as is her frequent habit.

Old Miss Roden regrets that the quiet will not be so absolute as she could desire. "While the Hendersons have Mr. Fletcher staying there, we may be sure there will be something going on."

"But, aunt he is just like one of our—of themselves," Madge says, hastily.

"Mrs. Henderson is quite infatuated about the young man," Miss Roden, the elder remarks, severely. "I quite look upon her as accountable for him in this neighborhood; she has introduced him."

In her heart of hearts, Miss Roden is a little jealous of the more sympathetic married woman's influence over Madge. "I respect Mrs. Henderson for her many good qualities," Aunt Lucy says sometimes; "but she is apt to rely too much on her own judgment." This being her opinion of Mrs. Henderson, she is not altogether sorry when slight difficulties, not to say little evils, may be fairly anticipated from the results of any of Mrs. Henderson's ill considered acts.

Madge is not inclined to argue this morning; she merely says:

"I don't see that the neighborhood has any business to question her regard for her old friend's son," and then walks away to the Vicarage, thinking a good deal about the guest, and his sprained ankle, and his many delightful qualities. He is the first young man, it must be borne in mind, who has ever come intimately into Madge's life. And unquestionably he is a very delightful first experience.

The drive through the Vicarage grounds curls and twists about in a sinuous and surprising way. Madge comes suddenly face to face with the man she is thinking about, and to her good-natured pleasure marks in a moment that he is not lame any longer. "You will be able to come to us this last day, won't you?" she asks, very winningly, and the strain evidently pains him, for he limps as he answers:

"I hope so; I am desperately inclined to be rash, if Mrs. Henderson will let me; but at any rate you must tell me whom you expect to-day. I know all your names now, and I want you to tell me who I am to like and dislike when I meet them."

"This looks like his staying for some time," Madge thinks, with a certain amount of pleasure in the thought, and so rather brightly she proceeds to mention several people, and give him brief incisive word paintings of them.

"I gather that they are more interesting as described by you, than they will be in real life," he says. "I should have known them all so easily if I had come to your ball the other night; that sprain was a miserable misfortune. The *South Journal* says: 'All the rank, fashion, beauty, and grace of the neighborhood assembled in Miss Roden's hospitable mansion, where dancing was kept up till a late hour.' Tell me about the beauties!"

"There were not many—only one real beauty," Madge begins, truthfully. Then she generously reminds herself that the first description is the one that always influences the mind, and so she determines to say "true things" about the many girls who will be hoping for this man's notice while he is staying here.

"I ought to have said there are so many sweet, charming girls about here."

"But only one regular beauty; tell me about her. I don't care for sweet, charming girls."

"She is a Miss Aveland."

"An intimate friend of yours? Is there any chance of my seeing her at Moorbridge House?"

"Every chance," Madge answers, with what he considers most uncalled-for animation.

"She is a most intimate friend, though she hasn't been here very long."

They are standing under the veranda outside the dining-room window now, and Mrs. Henderson from inside hears Madge's last words, guesses to whom they relate, and comes up to join in the conversation.

"You're speaking of Olive, I suppose, Madge. By-the-way, Philip, she knew your cousin, she told me last night."

Mrs. Henderson put her hand on her favorite's shoulder as she says this, and her favorite smiles faintly:

"I am constantly meeting with people who have that pleasure, to my sorrow, for they have a habit of mixing up the two Philip Fletchers in other people's minds," he says.

Madge scans his face curiously, keenly, then considerably averts her gaze as she suggests:

"I am sure the sun is too hot for you, Mr. Fletcher; let us go in." And as they go in, Mrs.

Henderson words that belief of hers that the other Phillip Fletcher has been rather too much to Miss Aveland, for her ever to make the mistake of "mixing him up" with the present Phil.

"Lucky fellow, if, as you say, she is such a beauty," he remarks. Then Mrs. Henderson tells him that his opportunities of judging of her beauty will be many; "for I'm as fond of her as Madge is, and I often get her here," she adds.

"I am afraid she won't show to-day; the Wil-mots would feel themselves defrauded of a portion of their pound of flesh if she wanted to come out two days following."

"Are they the friends she is staying with?"

"She is governess in their family," Mrs. Henderson explains, and again Madge observes that his face gets red and gets pale without any visible sufficient cause.

By the time the Queen of the Revels is due on the lawn, which is her throne, Mr. Philip Fletcher's ankle is strong enough to enable him to walk home with her. Mrs. Henderson is a good, prudent woman, but she is no dragon of propriety, or prudery rather. She permits the young people to walk away alone. And by the time the sun sets this day Philip Fletcher has made up his mind that the stakes he came down to look at are worth playing for at any risk. Unluckily for him, he has to play against time! As soon as he realizes this, he resolves to get over the first meeting with Madge's beautiful favorite friend, Miss Aveland, as soon as possible.

"It's the first holiday he has had for years, poor boy, and he does enjoy it so much," Mrs. Henderson says pathetically to Madge. And Madge's kind heart is at once stirred within her to make this holiday as pleasant an episode in his life of hard work and self-sacrifice as possible. With the close of the festive week, Halsworthy subsides into its normal condition of quiet, and by the dawning of the Monday of the next week, Philip has a very clear idea of what the ordinary Halsworthy life is.

"Her lines are cast in as secluded a spot as the Lady of Shalot's," he tells himself; "poor girl, with all that underlying vivacity she must be 'half sick of shadows.'"

He sketches boldly, cleverly, rapidly, and Madge knows all the best bits within a radius of ten miles. Her services are in constant requisition as this gifted amateur's guide. The guide is a very willing one, for the gifted amateur talks as cleverly as he sketches. They pass many long hours of these sunny summer days on the purple slopes of heath-covered hills of Exmoor, and Madge acknowledges to herself that she is getting more and more fascinated by this young fellow, who is as manly and clever as he is filial and good. Nevertheless, he is not the Philip she had pictured he would be, and sometimes a sense of disappointment seizes her. In short, long before Madge quite suffers her heart to stray into his keeping, it is broadly rumored in Halsworthy that they are engaged.

Undoubtedly Philip Fletcher has a power of staying as well as a turn of speed. In spite of its being so all-important to him, as he considers, to bring matters to a climax with this girl whom he means to make his wife, he does not mar or hinder himself by one hasty false step. To lookers-on he seems to be quietly walking over the course. But he is going with a caution that only he himself wots of.

He was rather tired of free expanses and bold sweeps of moor-land, he says to her one day. He wants some close bit of perfect water and foliage. Of course Madge is equal to the occasion, and can supply his wants at the pleasant cost of a scramble for a couple of miles along the bank of a river that is always in fierce action against the boulders in its midst.

"It's a series of water-falls all the way up," she explains, "but quite at the top where I mean, there is the sweetest, finest, grandest bit in the world."

"Sweet, fine, and grand! that will do," he says, as he takes up her shawl and his sketching materials, and indicates that he is ready to start.

"It's all there, I assure you, Mr. Fletcher; the river bounds down the hill-side at that point over a dozen intersecting rocks; the suddenness and the velocity are grand. Then the banks are wreathed with flowers, and ivy and ferns all down to the water's edge, that's sweet. And the way the trees arch themselves and meet overhead gives

one good ideas for a cathedral aisle, and that is fine, I am justified in my combination of epithets."

They are well into the scrambling path by the river-side now, and here and there steep places have to be clambered, for the path (such as it is) is up rather a sharp incline. Nature seems to be making herself as fascinatingly beautiful as she possibly can, for the benefit of these two young people.

The advantage there is in a man being tall and strong is very patent to her as Philip swings her easily round some intervening boulders. In the heart of her perfect appreciation of this fact, she ventures upon a topic she had never touched upon before, and asks:

"Are your sisters at all like you?"

"I have no sisters," he answers gayly, for Madge is looking particularly pretty, and he feels that his is going to be a very fair fate after all.

In her astonishment at this his utter renunciation of his nearest kin, Madge suffers her feet to slip from under her, and becomes immersed in about two feet of water. By the time she is pulled out, and her dress has been deftly wrung, Philip is ready with an explanation of that apparently incomprehensible speech.

"How could I remember the existence of my sisters or of any other human being, when my mind was so full of"—He pauses, for his tact teaches him that to finish his sentence as he had intended doing when he commenced it, will be to ruin his cause altogether. Madge thoroughly appreciates that pause. It saves her the responsibility of being definite, and she feels rather more indefinite at this moment than she has ever felt in her life before. Philip Fletcher is handsome, well-bred, and cleverly amusing. But so she had pre-determined he would be, before she had ever seen him. And she had also pre-determined that he would be something more—which he is not.

So Madge collects her faculties, and recollects the original topic which led to that vague remark of his.

"Now that your mind is no longer full of something it oughtn't to have been full of at all," she says, a little slyly, "I suppose you can answer my question, are your sisters at all like you?"

"N-o," he answers, a little hesitatingly. Chrissy and Mabel Fletcher are not at all the type of women Philip admires. But his hesitation in this matter of considering their claims to a resemblance of him is not due to vanity, but to vexation of spirit, of which Madge has no conception. No human being is altogether bad, and at this juncture the Philip Fletcher who is winning Madge Roden to the best of his ability, feels heartily ashamed of himself—and horridly afraid of either "going on" or "going back." So it is that he hesitates and blanches a little as he answers:

"No—they're not like me—happily for them."

There was a ring of something genuine about this speech—about the tone of it—about the look which accompanies it! And Madge is so sympathetic to anything that is genuine. She puzzles herself for a brief moment, as to whether it is self-contempt or self-compassion, this "something" which thrills her. That moment over—though she is puzzled still—she gives the rein to her sympathy and speaks:

"You mean them to be thought something very splendid indeed, when you say, 'happily for them' they're not like you. How I'd like to know your sisters."

In spite of this abject flattery, Madge is not a fawning flirt. Be it understood at once that her apparent desire to win and chain this man by all the subtle influences in her power, is only the result of her position and her passion for making her fellow-creatures think well of her. As the mistress of Moorbridge House she has been brought forward very prominently in her limited social circle. But he misjudges her a little, and believes that she is quite ready to pick up the handkerchief the instant it is his sovereign will to throw it. Believing this, he begins to undervalue her a little, and to ask himself: "After all, is that love worth having which has been won so easily?" For, clever as he is, Mr. Philip Fletcher has fallen into the manly error of mistaking Madge's admiration for the Idea he represents to her for love of himself.

The sketching-materials have been put up for a

long time, and the sun is going down with golden reluctance, and the thrill of the falling waters sounds more loudly than it does in broad day, before Fletcher and Madge Roden make the homeward move this night. By the time they do this they have advanced greatly in their intimacy—though he knows and she feels that he checked himself on the brink of an offer of marriage to her just now. Notwithstanding that apparently precautionary halt of his, he is doing good work with Madge this day. For he talks to her of the many ambitions of his boyhood, and she remembers how he renounced them for the benefit of his family.

Sauntering along in that soft summer night air by the side of the intemperate river, it occurs to her that all these long sunny hours spent together "are not to be justified" if she halts and wavers now. Madge is as honest as the day, and as honorable as a man, or rather as the perfect type of man, ought to be. She holds it to be as faulty a proceeding for a woman to raise false hopes, and then to screen herself behind innocence and unconsciousness, as it is for a man to do so. She had not meant to give him excellent opportunities of learning to love her, but it came home to her this evening that she had seemed to do it. And the seeming must have misled him to the full as much as if she had meant it. "And I wouldn't deceive a dog knowingly," the girl is thinking, self-condemningly, while the object of her compassion and remorse walks on in unusual silence by her side.

He is quite clever enough to follow the workings of her mind. Hers is a sensitive tell-tale face, that says "sorry or glad" as openly as a child's. He is right in so far as he thinks that Madge's eyes are opened to-night to the fact that he has passed the narrow boundary-line between friendship and love. But he is wrong in the deduction he draws, namely, that Madge will adopt a stand-off demeanor to him until she has quite made up her mind as to whether it would be well for her to repel or to accept him. Madge never in her life made a plan or chalked out a line of conduct that, if followed out, would be of benefit to herself alone. She is not likely to do it now. Unluckily for herself, she is as generous, as undesigning, and unsuspecting in this as in other matters. Madge would go on being just as friendly, just as frank, just as demonstrative of her regard for him as she had ever been, whether he proposed to her or not, and whether she refused him or not. That is, she will be these things if he will let her. But the chill fear that this well-liked new acquaintance, who seems much more like an old friend to her than anyone else in the world, has not struck her.

So he thinks she is leading him on after the manner of the majority, when she exclaims:

CHAPTER IV.

GENEROUS FOLLY.

"Thus doth the dust destroy the diamond."

"Look here! I used to play at coming to this cottage to spend my honey-moon, when I was a child," and she points as she speaks to a low thatched house that stands a little way back from the river, on a half-moon of turf that is studded with myrtles, just bursting into bloom, and with standard roses.

"With whom used you to play that interesting game?" he asks, with the slightest accent of sarcasm in his voice. He is not in the least in love with this girl, who is childish enough to be surprised at a man feeling (or feigning) love for her. But he is jealous, for all that, at her ever having played at love and matrimony before his advent.

"Why, with my doll, to be sure," she answers, feeling half ashamed at having been led into speaking of her baby pursuits. "I'd no brothers nor sisters, you know," she adds, apologetically; "and one must play with something. Old servants of ours live here, and let lodgings; so we can sit down and rest on this bench."

As she speaks, she stoops and walks in under the drooping branches of a tree that partially concealed a knobby, gnarled, uncomfortable combination of roots and branches that is supposed to look essentially rustic; and he follows her, and asks:

"No brothers nor sisters!—any cousins?"

"Oh, yes; I have cousins; but they live in London, and we never met as children."

"And no playfellows—no little lovers to bring 'a lily or a cherry, or some new-invented game,' as Haynes Baily sings." Again there is the slight, faint accent of jealous sarcasm in his tone; and this time Madge hears it, and knows what it means, and feels that in some way or other she has been wrong again.

There is a good deal of ease, and force, and freedom about a statement this semi-conviction impels her to make by-and-by. She has been very much accustomed all her life to make full confession of every fault and folly she is self-suspected of; and she is also very much accustomed to receive instant and loving forgiveness. She is craving for this man's pardon now—his pardon for a fault she has not committed; and so presently she says, so truthfully and timidly (and he merely thinks her an audacious flirt for her pains):

"I have never had a lover in my life, Mr. Fletcher; not even a baby one to bring me 'a lily or a cherry.'"

There is a rickety table in front of the knobby and gnarled seat, and on this Philip Fletcher leans his arms as he turns his head to look at the girl by his side; and her color rises fast and furiously, for his glance is a far bolder one than the Philip of her imaginings would have bestowed upon her.

"Oh! I see," he says, "it's your habit, Miss Roden, to ignore all the love that is offered to you. Well! it's a course that must save you a great deal of trouble; but how about the offerers?"

"Through her own act her majesty he wounds," she with her own hand gave him the nettle (it isn't a dagger, or anything true and tried, like steel) with which he is stinging her now. Why did she say anything about that childish pastime of hers? Why did he lure her into this conversational web by means of Haynes Baily's innocent little song?"

"Ah!" she says quickly, really stung into imprudence now, "you shouldn't say that. If any offerings had been made, do you think I would ever speak of them to you—to anyone?"

He is trying to make up his mind as to whether or not it would be well to take the leap now at once, or whether it would be well to wait, and make her feel and fear that her prey may escape her altogether. He misconstrues her utterly and entirely. He believes that she is giving him encouragement, and that it is quite on the cards that she may only be desirous of adding his scalp to her collection. For he has no faith in that statement of hers that she has never had a lover; and as he hesitates and pauses, Madge rises and picks up the light shawl which she has thrown on the table, and in doing so pulls to the ground a pair of scissors that have been lying there unobserved.

"Mrs. Ball must have lodgers," she remarks, as she picks up the gilt-handled scissors; "these can't be hers. I'll go and hear who it is."

And before Philip Fletcher has made up his mind as to whether it would be well to put it to the touch quite so soon or not, Madge has crossed the myrtle-studded lawn, and is knocking at the door of the cottage.

In another instant a pleasant buzz falls on his ears. Madge's rich clear voice is raised in gratified surprise, and some fuller, deeper notes that are not unfamiliar—that are, "Yes, by Jove! that are Olive's," he cries, as against his own sense of expediency he rises, and goes half across the lawn, and there waits to be called for, to be seen, to be—he hardly dares to think what.

Meantime the pleasant buzz has ceased, and there is a sort of low hum of explanation going on inside the pretty cottage, the outside of which is all beauty, and peace, and flowers. There is a goodly share of beauty inside also; but there is no peace in one breast at least, and the flowers are changing to noxious weeds rapidly.

Madge, having crossed the threshold, has been met, stopped, petrified nearly, by the apparition of a tall lissom figure in unbleached holland. (In the midst of her astonishment, Madge notices the admirable manner in which the polonaise deports itself, and resolves to have the pattern of it.) There is nothing at all melodramatic about the utterance of the tall lissom figure; she merely says:

"When did *this* Mr. Fletcher come, dear?"

"Why, some time ago," Madge answers; "don't you know? Of course you don't, though; you know nothing of what goes on in Halsworthy, when Halsworthy shakes off dull sloth. But are you *here*? and why are you here, and how are you here?"

"I have had neuralgia, and I've come here for a holiday and a change," Olive Aveland says, rather deprecatingly; and Madge protests:

"A change! coming into the bed of a river for neuralgia; why didn't you come to me? You shall come to-night."

"I cannot."

She emphasizes her refusal very firmly; but Madge can be equally decided, equally firm. In the bottom of this latter's heart there lurks a happy thought that it will be well to have Olive Aveland with them for the remainder of the homeward walk. "Perhaps he may fall in love with Olive," Madge thinks; "and if he does, I wonder if I should like it."

"Do go on, dear," Olive says, "and leave me quiet; the least thing drives me half mad with pain now; do go on to-night."

"That's because you need change and excitement," Madge says, sapiently. Then she proceeds to introduce strong elements of both these things into Olive's life by going to the door and calling for "Mr. Fletcher."

He comes in at once, without delay, without embarrassment, apparently. There is nothing else for him to do—and (off the boards) he is a capital actor.

He comes in with that first coating of expression on his face, which can take the color from any other person's look. Whatever Olive Aveland may do, however she may look or speak, she will not be able to surprise him into awkwardness, hesitation, or sorrow. He will follow easily, however tortuous the path she may take. She takes a straight one; and still, odd as it may seem, he follows her.

He is one of the easiest-going men on the face of the earth. Literally, he never "troubles" himself about anything. This venture that he is making now is the most arduous work of his life; and already he begins to repent himself of making it, because of the labor it involves.

After all he begins to question, "What is the worth of it all?" If all goes smoothly, and he marries this fresh young girl and her two thousand a year, will the "second place" he will take satisfy him. He will be accepted with reservations by her friends, he knows, and he will be mentally right in hating them for being morally right and there is nothing for him to do now but to go on.

He arrives at this conclusion as Olive Aveland comes into the passage, well into the light that is shed through the door-way, and says:

"A friend of yours, Madge, I suppose? I am glad to see him."

"There will be no difficulty with a woman who can say this, to spare another woman feelings." At least, Philip is sure of this for a moment. Then he wonders "what she means," as Olive's eyes show him that she is glad, very glad, to see him.

She is splendidly handsome! Of this, at any rate, there is no doubt, as she goes back with a swing into the low-roofed, lattice-windowed room, and bids them follow her. Come what will of this *rencontre*, Olive is resolved to play the hostess to-night to Philip Fletcher.

"You benighted wanderers must stay and have supper with me," she says, moving rapidly about, and directing Mrs. Ball to bring in everything eatable and drinkable that the house contains, or that can be procured at this unhallowed hour. And so presently the feast is spread, and rather well spread too; for Olive's services are valuable to Mrs. Wilmot, and that lady seeks to regain them speedily by a supply of well-stocked baskets.

They have been talking scenery vigorously ever since Philip came in. His sketch has been shown, and Olive has looked at it with eyes that see nothing, but that glisten strangely. As she gives it back to him, his hand touches hers, his eyes fasten on and holds her, and she shivers in a way that betokens that she is feeling either joy or pain.

"Olive, dear, you're cold," Madge says, "and it's

time I were at home; we don't deserve supper at your hands, do we, Mr. Fletcher?"

She appeals to him in the lightest way. She means absolutely nothing more than this, that as Olive is cold and chilled, it is a pity to keep her up. But there is a deeper meaning Olive feels, in the way in which Philip Fletcher responds:

"I don't deserve anything at Miss Aveland's hands. That is the only thing I feel sure of."

"And that feeling is the result of Mrs. Ball being rather slow in her movements, and many other things being out of joint." Olive speaks with a carelessness which she is very far from feeling. But Philip's speech has this effect upon her; she feels very strong, and very merciful!

By-and-by (this water-side cottage is close to Halsworthy), Mrs. Henderson walks down, having, "felt certain that she should find them there," she says; and they all sit down, and eat and drink things that are pleasant, and avoid things that are unpleasant, at Olive's little oval table. Would that the same could be said of every gathering for friendly and festive purposes!

At length a remembrance of old Miss Roden arises, and Madge pronounces the decree that they must part, as she must go home, and assuage any anxiety that Aunt Lucy may think proper to feel. And so they all saunter out together into the cool quiet night air, Olive going with them.

As they pass slowly over the turf under the moonlight, Miss Aveland is divided from Philip by Madge and Mrs. Henderson. But he alters this arrangement presently, by crossing over to gather a great shiny, starry branch of jasmines that hang temptingly over the garden hedge. This brings him by Olive's side, and as he calls her attention to the immense size of the jasmines flowers unseen by the others, his hand clasps hers.

Clasps it in a way that nearly makes her cry out with the pain of this joy that may be as treacherous as all the joys she has ever felt through him have proved themselves.

Whatever he may have been, false, feeble, cowardly, at any rate she has the bliss of feeling that at the present moment he is not indifferent. His hand trembles to the full as much as hers does, and his face is full of earnest desire to make her look at him in a way that shall be intelligible to him. But, though she lets her hand rest in his for a moment, she will not let him wring the whole truth from the eyes that have grown deeper through long weeping for him.

"It's still quite early," Madge says. "It would only be sensible of Olive to come in with us, and tell Aunt Lucy that it's her Arcadian freak that has made us so late as this, even." And though she faintly negatives the proposition at first, she presently assents; for it is passing sweet to her, this sight of him.

Beautiful Moorbridge House rises before them directly, standing out clearly from its background of foliage-covered hill-side. The lawn has recovered from the effects of the Halsworthy week, and presents its usual emerald green and velvety appearance. Rich odors from flower-beds and open conservatory windows are wafted toward them. All looks and feels smooth, prosperous, safe. It will be "a position that none but a fool would resign, that of being the master of this place," Philip Fletcher thinks as he strolls with face bent down toward Olive Aveland.

Aunt Lucy comes to the open French window of the drawing-room conservatory (a modern addition), and they assuage the anxiety and appease the wrath of the dear old lady, who is never, by any chance, either wrathful or anxious. They are very loth to part, although it seems as if they had nothing left to say to one another, for they sit out on the garden chairs for another hour at least, almost in silence.

Madge is tired, puzzled, uncertain of her own wishes. Mrs. Henderson is puzzled too, but very certain of her own wishes. Olive is in one of those tempests of memory, when one thought after another comes upon one like alternate peals of deafening thunder and dazzling lightning. She cannot but remember how passionately this man by her side wooed her long ago. She cannot but remember how soon after that passionate wooing he told her he had never loved her. Thoughts of the misery and madness, of the shame, and the fury, and the agony of love thrown back in her

face, are upon her now. What wonder that she does not speak? What wonder that she marvels whether all this is a dream within a dream, as she recalls that fervent, trembling clasp his hand gave hers—only one little hour ago by the river-side.

Mrs. Henderson breaks the spell by saying:

"Phil, I had a note from your sister Mabel to-day; she is anxious about Chrissy."

"About Chrissy?" he stammers.

"Yes; haven't they told you? She has an attack of that wearing intermittent fever and ague. Mabel, in her anxiety, forgets to mention you; but she speaks of that ne'er-do-well cousin of yours."

There is a long pause after this. Then Philip dares all, knowing that Olive's eyes are on him.

"What of him, Mrs. Henderson?"

"She says, 'My dear mother is miserable about our cousin Philip; we have heard nothing of him for weeks, and in spite of all his faults we are very fond of him.'"

"Poor, affectionate Mabel," Philip says; and there is a huskiness in his voice that makes both Mrs. Henderson and Madge feel very tender to him.

"I believe you are fond of the ne'er-do-well yourself," Madge says, cordially; and he can't answer her, for Olive's eyes are on him still.

It is settled at last, how or why no one can say, that Mrs. Henderson shall walk home with one of Madge's servants, and Philip Fletcher escorts Miss Aveland back to her lodgings. As soon as they clear off Madge's grounds, Olive stops short and exclaims:

"Why are you masquerading here? What object have you in deceiving that good woman and that poor girl who may be miserable enough to love you? Why are you passing yourself off as your cousin?"

Almost simultaneously Mrs. Henderson is saying:

"Madge, you have something to tell me? Is it what I hope?"

CHAPTER V.

"THE LITTLE PITTED SPECK ON GARNERED FRUIT."

He does not attempt to answer Olive Aveland in words. He just possesses himself of her hands, and bends his face down on them; and as he does this, a great choking breath, that is more than half sigh, bursts from him full of all manner of feeling. And so in the old days has he often sighed his soul out, by way of stopping any awkward inquiries; and so in the old days, before he discovered his love for her, had he been wont to kiss her hands. And she remembers all these things, and still can only say:

"Oh, Philip! oh, Philip, Philip!"

Of course stern standers-up for the dignity of the female sex will say that she ought, if not exactly to hate him (Christian charity forbids that), to crush him by unaffected contempt and indifference. When a man has once trifled with and wounded a woman's heart, that heart is, we all know, in duty (to its owner) bound to be like ice to him henceforth. But, unfortunately, the heart is an organ that will not always perform its high and proper duties, especially if these latter be repugnant to it.

It is idiotic of her to stand there and suffer him to treat her hands affectionately, when he had treated her heart so badly. But women are apt to be idiotic in these matters—apt to forget the offense in the presence of the offender.

She wrings herself away from him presently, and says angrily, for she feels that he is only fooling her again:

"You can't answer my question—I see you can't. Until to-night I thought that, odd as it seemed to me, they must know you were *you*; but that speech of Mrs. Henderson's to-night about the ne'er-do-well!—oh, Philip!"

She breaks down, panting to subdue her inclination to cry, and he feels that he must speak or have a scene.

"It's not the most honorable position in the world that I'm occupying now," he says bitterly. "No one knows that better than myself; but, after all, my masquerading, as you call it, will do no harm to anyone. Some time or other, when I have won her liking thoroughly, I shall tell Mrs. Henderson that I'm not that admirable Crichton, my cousin; and then, if she continues to honor me

with her regard, though she knows I'm not the son of her old friend, it will prove to *you* that I'm not so utterly worthless."

"As if it mattered what I thought," she says hotly, walking on with steps that are uncertain toward the river-side cottage. "And as for doing 'no harm' to any one—what are you doing to Miss Roden? She *shall* not learn to love you," she continues in a whirlwind of different feelings. "I won't stand by quietly, and see dear Madge walk into a net of your weaving."

He sees that she is jealous, and he is sure of her loving him still as he ever was. This being the case, he has no fear of what she may do.

The brisk night air clears his mind, and cools the warm tumultuous feelings which the sight of this girl has engendered in his heart again. His heart! yes, actually his heart. For, in spite of that crushing letter of years ago, Olive Aveland sways him, thrills him, fires him, as no other woman has ever done. In short, in spite of his selfish policy, pursued because he fancies he "can't strike out a decent career," because he believes that he never will be any thing but a ne'er-do-well, he loves her, and would at this moment sacrifice any human being (but himself) to kiss her lips and feel that he might do it.

But he checks the impulse to cast himself on the hot loving heart that, outraged as it is, is still so true to him. He lifts his hat off a brow that is so much wider and braver than it need be, considering the quality of that which is beneath it, and—he is prudent.

"You are as harsh to me as the rest of the world, Olive."

"Oh, Heaven help me to be so!" she cries, sharply.

"You distrust me as every one else does. How can a man do right who is universally distrusted? It will not be through the help of any of my fellow-creatures if I ever do walk a decently straight course, for they have done all they can to make my way devious." He winds up with a reckless, scornful laugh. "Olive," he bends down and looks earnestly into her face, "let me have a chance of making friends with these people. It will be like the warning note of 'the leper,' if you tell them I am that outcast cousin of the Fletchers, whom the Hendersons have been taught to consider a social miscreant."

"I shall be only one degree less horribly wrong than yourself." Then a shock of revulsion of feeling overcomes her, and she whimpers, "Philip! do, do tell me what brought you here; will you, Philip?"

Her voice is very pathetic, very full of some belief in him that he can't quite understand for a moment or two. Then, at the expiration of that moment or two, some evil spirit clears his vision, and he knows that poor Olive Aveland believes that he has come here to be near her again.

He deadens his conscience, he resolutely closes his heart to the appeal made to it by that girl's trusting faith and clinging love, and resolves to use her belief as a weapon in his own service. And it is not altogether easy, nor is it altogether difficult, for him to do this; for he loves the girl who stands trembling by his side—trembling with a truer, deeper love for him than he will ever inspire in another woman's heart.

"Darling!" he says in a desperate kind of whisper, as if the truth were being wrung from him against his will, "does not your heart tell you why I came here—where you were?"

The last words were in such a sunken, pleasing voice, that it carries conviction with it to the heart and mind of that girl, who would—what would she not give to be loved once more by this man, who once made her the by-word that, in spite of our sense of justice, jilted girls are?

She does not actually say, "Did you come to me, Philip?" but she looks with those glorious velvet eyes of hers, that are so unspeakably soft and seductive, and once more he lowers his head down close, very close, to her own as he calls her:

"My darling! always my darling!"

She is in a fool's paradise for a few moments more while the echo of that loving whisper still lingers in her ear; then she finds that she is at the water-side cottage gate, and that she must say, "good-night," to this man, who is her lover, and still not her lover. She feels as if the ground

were slipping from under her feet—as if he might vanish, and she never see him more, even as he holds her hand in his and bids her a "good-bye" so full of gentleness and consideration that it seems to have a promise in it.

"Shall I see—when shall I see you again?" she ventures to say. "You know I am here alone, and so you mustn't call here; but in a day or two, if you like, I shall be back at Mrs. Wilmot's, and I can always see my friends there!"

She marks his brow lower in the middle of her sentence, and so there is an anxious ring in her voice toward the end of it.

"For your sake, I don't think it would be well for me to call there yet, darling," he replies softly; "just at present you see"—

And she interrupts him to say:

"Oh, Philip; as you like—when you like, only don't tell me that this is good-bye after all these years."

And then she goes in, beaten down and humiliated in a measure, by her knowledge of the utter abnegation of anything like an attempt at dignity of which she has been guilty.

Her head is in a whirl, and her heart is thumping, but the action of both is checked abruptly by a certain sullen look of disapprobation that sits upon the countenance of her landlady, when the door is opened. Olive understands it in an instant. The strict sense of propriety which animates the matronly British bosom is outraged by these late walks abroad.

"I have been up to Moorbridge House with Miss Roden," she begins, faltering. But the landlady interrupts the sentence with vicious civility:

"I dare say you have, miss; and I shouldn't have waited up long after my usual time, if it wasn't that I wanted to tell you to-night—thinking that there might be inconvenience in your leaving it in the morning—that the rooms are engaged from to-morrow, miss; and the party coming in at once."

A great flush of color burns all over Olive's face. She feels that this woman dares to deem her (Olive) guilty of something like impropriety or carelessness of conduct—dares to try and show her that she has been wrong in some way or other. And she has no home to go to; no place but Mrs. Wilmot's house, and Mrs. Wilmot will question why she "left her lodgings, when she was really getting stronger so quickly." All these considerations force themselves upon her mind at once, and she is overwrought by that unexpected sight of the old love which has been given her to-night, and she is only a woman, and so she cries.

But only for a moment, though. Olive Aveland is not of the order that attempts to wash away disagreeables in a flood of tears. She dries her eyes with a speed that perplexes her landlady, who has gone to get a bedroom candlestick, and who finds her young lodger quite herself again, on her return to the passage.

"I'll pay you to-night—I shall leave directly after breakfast," Olive says; "I suppose you can get a boy to take my boxes."

"Where to?" the landlady asks, reflectively. And a direct inspiration leads Olive to answer:

"To Moorbridge House."

The immediate effect of this direct inspiration is to make the landlady feel that, "Well, if ever there was a serpent, it is this young person at Mrs. Wilmot's; to dare and go to the shelter of Miss Madge's roof, when she had been walking with Miss Madge's young man!"

However, Miss Aveland's manner is conclusive, and so the mistress of the water-side cottage does not make any open appeal or protest. But she goes to bed thinking, "that if ever *there was* a serpent, this one was, and Miss Madge did ought to know."

It is the

"Little pitted speck in garner'd fruit,

That, rotting inward, slowly molders all."

Poor Olive Aveland was not very carefully "garnered" in these days by anyone. But the "little pitted speck" was upon her already in that landlady's eyes.

This is not the first time that Olive Aveland has been tried, judged, found guilty, and condemned unfairly. Years ago, when Philip Fletcher jilted

her (it is as well to use the expression concerning her that was always used, even by her dearest friends, *behind her back*, in those desolate days). Years ago, when Philip Fletcher jilted her, her little world—the circle of friends and acquaintances in which was comprised "everybody" to her young mind, had been disturbed by the broken alliance.

"The world is a nettle—disturb it, it stings; Grasp it firmly, it stings not. On one of two things, If you would not be stung, it behoves you to settle—

Avoid it or crush it. She crushed not the nettle, For she could not, nor would she avoid it; she tried, With the weak hand of a woman to thrust it aside, And it stung her! A woman is too slight a thing To trample the world without feeling its sting."

These lines adapted themselves to her poor, common case with bitter force and accuracy. The world would not be tolerant to the reserve she had displayed about those broken vows which had blighted her life. It whispered about her, and surmised about her, and undermined all her bravery and self-reliance and common sense.

So, in an evil hour she had writhed round, and "tried, with the weaker hand of a woman, to thrust" aside the nettles of social slight and contumely that the very people who blamed Philip Fletcher so severely showered upon her. She evaded questions that only cut her, and could never cure her pain. She grew silent, "sulky and contumacious, and conscience-stricken," they called it each of these things, in turn, when they had wanted her to analyze for their amusement, each phase of this life-agony of hers—each act of this heart-murder that Philip had committed. And so at last she had been so tortured, poor thing, in various minor ways, that might seem very small and insignificant if written down here, that she had mistaken the solicitude of her uncle for severity, and had gone out from the scenes of the life and death of her love into what seemed a wilderness.

And now, after the long, hard battle with incongruous associations, and uncongenial surroundings, and her own insubordinate spirit, she has met that wrecker again, and is ready as ever to be wrecked.

"He will come back to her," she tries to tell herself—tries to feel that she believes, as she next morning recalls every act, and word, and look of love and devotion that he had vouchsafed to her the previous night. They were not many, when counted up even with the care with which a woman who is madly, foolishly, hopelessly in love does count up such things. They were not many. A few of those impassioned looks that practice had made him so perfect in. A few lingering hand-clasps, that might have been (how her face burns, flames, fires at the doubt) as much her fault as his. A few melodious "darlings!" that were—ah! well! sweeter than any sound in the world to her, for all their doubtful value.

She has a very brave, honest, honorable trust in Madge Roden, and in Madge Roden's sincerity and constancy, and general womanliness and worth. Yet for all this perfect trust poor Olive feels very dubious and diffident, as she comes into her friend's presence the next day after that moonlight walk.

Madge is in the middle of the installment for that month of an absorbing serial story, in which "all the people are just as commonplace as she is herself," she feels with a certain sense of gratitude to the author for not having made his puppets too exalted for her to sympathize with them. She has "had it out" with Mrs. Henderson about that absorbing young guest at the Vicarage, who is concentrating all the attention "of everybody" (she means of herself and Mrs. Henderson) upon herself at present. And she is trying to feel a weight of responsibility pressing upon her shoulders concerning the forthcoming Harvest Festival, and generally endeavoring to feel that "uneasy lies the head that wears a crown."

And failing, failing altogether, she knows, for she is too bright, as well as too true, to humbug even herself successfully.

To her enters Olive, at a great disadvantage to-day, by reason of the untoward events of last evening. At a further disadvantage—shall not the whole truth be told concerning these very human beings, by reason of all the starch having come out of her brown holland polonaise. We are all dependent on these trifles. No girl can be at her

best when her dress is limp in a way that it was not designed to be.

"Oh, Madge," she begins, rather hurriedly and confusedly; "what will you think when I tell you I have come to claim your hospitality—will you take me in?"

Madge has bounded to her feet at the first word of Olive's intention; she is ready with her welcome as if she had been preparing it for a week.

"I am glad—I am glad, you dear, to have come to me after all; you shall have the biggest room with the sweetest view, opening into mine. I mean the room opens into mine, not the view, you know—and we'll sit up chattering all night."

Madge has had very few enthusiastic friends in her brief life. To her there is an immense amount of unhallowed bliss in the prospect of sitting up chatting (she doesn't know or care about what) half the night.

"The fact is, dear," Miss Aveland prevaricates, love and conscience making a thorough coward of her—"Mrs. Bale had an opportunity of letting her lodgings, so I thought, as you had asked me"—

"Oh! bless Mrs. Bale!" Madge interrupts, glittering all over with the delight of having this selected friend of hers domesticated with her in her own house; "it's better than the whole Halsworthy week put together to have you here."

"It's better than the whole Halsworthy week put together to be here, I know that," Olive says devotedly as she remembers how intimate Mrs. Henderson (his guardian angel) and Madge are, and speculates upon the increased probabilities of seeing him.

"I am going to lunch with Mrs. Henderson," Madge says presently, "and now you must come too, and we're going to fish up the valley after luncheon; won't it be jolly! you and I together fishing."

"Is she fond of fishing? I thought she didn't care for anything of that sort," Olive says hypocritically, in her desire to be assured as to whom the "we" referred to are.

And Madge's answer is given without hesitation:

"No. Mrs. Henderson doesn't care a bit about fishing, but she is going with Mr. Fletcher and me to-day, because I begged for her company so hard she couldn't refuse me."

"You don't like being alone with him, then," Olive cries, in her unwitting jealousy. She would have every woman sigh for him, in fact, while she should sigh for none but her. Poor deluded Olive.

"I think even in Halsworthy one ought to be careful," Madge says, majestically, strengthening herself to utter the saying by the thought that it is a fierce light than beats upon her. "One cannot be too careful," she repeats, with an emphasis of which she does not herself know the full meaning—an emphasis Olive who begins to fear that she may not have been careful enough in the matter of meandering about last night with Philip Fletcher, winces under.

"Well, Madge," she says, with a smile that tries hard to be scornful, and that only succeeds in being very, very sorrowful, "the lion is lying down with the lamb with a vengeance, when you and prudent considerations are allied."

And Madge utterly oblivious both of the scorn and the sorrow, says truly enough, as she shakes her dear, glossy head:

"They don't fether either of us very much, I fancy, and why should they, when we never wish to do anything imprudent. Olive, if you wear buff to-day, I'll wear blue—then we shan't clash."

As if the color of their dresses was the only matter in which those two girls could clash! Those two girls whom Philip Fletcher was moving about the board very much as he willed.

So, again, it was an amber witch who contrasted with bright Madge (Madge has blue this time). An oval-faced amber witch with velvet eyes of the deepest hue, and with a supple lissom figure, the grace of which would lead the eye off the face of a Venus.

Seeing her come in by gracious, open-hearted Madge's side to luncheon at Mrs. Henderson's, previous to starting on the fishing excursion, Philip calls himself "a blackguard," and calls himself so heartily.

CHAPTER VI.

FISHING!

"Let fate do her worst, there are relics of joy,
Bright gleams of the past, which she cannot destroy."

"As I don't care to vex my soul with a line and a fly (what fools the fishes must be to believe in anything so palpably artificial)," she interpolates contemptuously, pointing to a coachman and "blue-upright," which Philip had provided with much care and forethought, "I must take something to read."

Mrs. Henderson is the speaker, and her appeal is made to Madge. Madge being in a hurry to get off, puts her hand down on the first book she sees.

"*The Cornhill*! Mrs. Henderson is reading it, I know," Philip apologizes. "The small House at Allington" is the serial story in *The Cornhill* at this time, and Philip has no fancy this afternoon for listening to Mrs. Henderson's running commentary on Crosbie's many virtues! It is patent to everyone who knows anything at all of Philip Fletcher, that there is nothing hard or obtuse about him. He is a sensitive man. Vain, as nearly all sensitive people are, and rather greedy of the goodwill and opinion of those with whom he is associating. Moreover, he has a deep-rooted dislike to seeing pain depicted on anyone's face. And he knows well what sort of shadow would fall over Olive's lustrous velvet eyes if any allusion were made to the troubles of Lily Dale.

They walk away through the village, past the river-side fishing cottage, on their way up the valley to fish. And Halsworthy in general, and Mrs. Bale in particular, are well pleased to see the order of their march. Madge and Philip are sauntering about ten yards behind Mrs. Henderson and Olive Aveland.

Philip is one of the men who are under all circumstances invariably well dressed. On what principle tailors whom he never pays supplies him with their best broadcloth and their most artistic make, it is impossible to say. Perhaps they like the light-hearted audacity with which he criticises and complains more freely than the majority of their paying customers put together. Perhaps they recognize in his easy manner of entering their shops, when he owes them more money than they ever even hope he may pay, something of the relentlessly brave highwayman spirit, which made well-bred travelers relinquish their purses with something like pleasure to Dick Turpin and Tom Fag-gus. At any rate, whatever the cause, his habit is far "more costly than his purse can buy."

His light gray clothes to-day are judiciously brightened by a button-hole bouquet composed of harmoniously-blended pale pink and blue flowers. These attract foolish insects naturally; and one specially fine specimen of the humming-bird moth plunges headlong into the midst of the bouquet, and there whizzes and buzzes with a loudly expressed delight that attracts Madge's attention. Some prescience (women in love are very much like spiders, they see with the back of their heads when the men they love are behind them) makes Olive look round at this very moment, and she sees one of Madge's small hands firmly grasping his gray coat-sleeve to keep him steady, while with the other she makes frantic dabs at the humming-bird moth which is bobbing about his bouquet.

Olive's own feeling about him is that she would willingly walk ten miles to catch a glimpse of him any day. And she *aches* now as she sees another girl's hand on his arm, although she feels almost (not quite) sure that Madge has no sentiment concerning the happy position that hand is occupying. Olive feels sure that he is looking down into Madge's face with that steady, desperate, ardent look, which she (Olive) has learned to love better than any other look on earth. "Why can't I hate him, or be indifferent to him?" she asks herself hopelessly as she stares at this little scene, and Mrs. Henderson quietly reads her face.

"Is Phil anything like that cousin of his whom you knew once, dear?" Mrs. Henderson asks, following the direction of Olive's eyes; and Olive recovers herself, and remembers how he had called her "darling" the night before, and how he had implied, or she had thought he had meant to imply, that she was the magnet that had drawn him hither, and feels that she can't betray him to this

good motherly woman whose friendship he wants to win.

"Yes, very much like his cousin," she stammers out as the loiterers come up—Madge with the insect captive in her handkerchief—Philip with his bouquet a trifle mutilated by Miss Roden's chase through it after the moth.

In spite of her strong feeling that she is unwise to do it, Olive cannot help managing so that she walks next to Philip along the rapidly narrowing path. She longs to have him assure her, in the rapid, imperceptible, fervent way he has of offering such assurances, that it was by no design of his that Madge and himself had dropped behind. She longs to hear him call her "Olive." She longs for the path to become dangerous, that he may help her over it. She longs to see him look the "darling" he dare not speak with other ears so near.

Madge's voice, raised high in hilarious mimicry of some acquaintance known only to Mrs. Henderson and herself, is wafted back to the pair behind. And when he breaks the silence, it is to say:

"What a pleasant light ring there is in Miss Roden's voice; she's the best specimen of unspoiled heiress I've ever met in my life."

"She's a dear girl, and I'm very fond of her," Olive says stoutly, though at that moment she is anything but fond of the dear girl for whom Philip is expressing admiration. Her prophetic soul tells her that Philip has no intention to-day of even surreptitiously resuming the demeanor of last night. Her heart sinks, and she wishes herself a hundred miles away while he glances unseen at the love-fraught, downcast face, and can hardly resist kissing its melancholy away, whatever the cost of his rashness may be. But she is not her uncle's heiress any longer, and, in "justice to her, he can not ask her to share his miserable fortunes." "She's not the type of girl to take to wife in an attic on a crust of bread," he tells himself. And as he is no longer afraid of Olive's impetuosity betraying him (the most impetuous women are always easily kept down by love), he resolves to charitably cool off to her from this hour.

The two girls whip the stream for more than an hour, perseveringly and unskillfully. Then Olive, in utter fatigue (fatigue of heart, not of body), sits herself down by Mrs. Henderson, and as she does so she sees Philip move up nearer to Madge.

She tries not to look at them—she tries to fix her eyes on the distant waving lines of heath-crowned hills, and she fails.

"Child, you're wretched about something?" Mrs. Henderson says, suddenly, and as Olive shakes her head by way of feebly negating the assertion, Mrs. Henderson goes on:

"My dear, I know better; very few of us marry our first loves. I am a happy wife and mother now, Olive, but I've sickened, and sorrowed, and suffered as much as a woman can suffer and sorrow at the sight of a man who was not Mr. Henderson. My dear, I've kissed my own hand after that other man has shaken it; do you think that a woman who has gone through the fire can't see when another is scorched? Is he so like his cousin, Olive?"

For a moment Olive thinks that she will explode this deception which her idol is practicing. Then she tells herself that "it would be mean, cruel, unwomanly to do it—he has so few friends, poor fellow. Fate and Fortune have been so brutal to him," she finally believes. So she just puts her poor little trembling hand up over her aching eyes, and answers:

"Yes, he is."

"We are both very fond of this Phil," Mrs. Henderson goes on, "though he's been with us for such a short time; my husband and I feel toward him as if he were a younger brother; this morning Mr. Henderson received an answer to an application he has made for a good appointment, that will be much more remunerative than the one he holds now"—

"Has he taken it?" Olive gasps. This is deceiving the blind and winning Esau's birthright by fraud with a vengeance, she thinks.

"He hasn't been told of it yet," Mrs. Henderson says. "Madge and you must dine with us to-night, and hear us give him the good news."

"What is it?" Olive asks.

"The managership of my husband's brother's house. My brother-in-law is tired of active work, and is going to give it up; he says if young Fletcher pleases him it will lead to a partnership."

He is to be given his chance at last. Poor fellow! he has been kept out of it so long that Olive can do no other than hold her peace, and hope that there is not much iniquity in this tacit deception of which she is guilty. Poor Olive! she is fool enough to hope something else too. And that is, when his success is certified he will return to his allegiance to herself. That he will do it she is sure—if Madge does not win him in the meantime.

Really, Madge looks very much like winning him now. She is tired of whipping the stream and never landing a trout, and so has pulled in her line and is standing close up by him, talking to him eagerly about the color of the winding, purplish hills, and the rich, brown sherry hue of the water, and the rarified blue-pink there is in the atmosphere. She hasn't the faintest notion that her friend Olive Aveland, sitting behind her, and watching all her gestures, and her rapidly-changing expression, is accusing her of being a profound and consummate flirt.

"By-and-by, as their dilatory steps take them a little further up stream, they come upon another angler, who is fishing lazily the while he is comfortably seated smoking on the trunk of a tree, that has fallen half across the rapid, rushing river. At first sight of him Philip sees that he is a fine, good-looking, fair, rather uncultivated young man. That is all. In another minute Philip is informed that this young man, whom he has tried and found wanting so rapidly, is Griffiths Poynter, a young squire of the neighborhood, recently come into his own, and suspected at once by Philip of having designs on Madge the heiress.

There is something very quieting to these fears, which are not the offspring of jealous love, in the way in which Madge presently greets this man.

"What a nuisance that you should have chosen to-day of all others to come and fish this bit of the river, Grif," she says, in tones of unmistakable annoyance. "I did want Mr. Fletcher to take home a good basket to-day, and here you have spoiled my best bit."

Philip Fletcher forgives Madge for calling this "new fellow" thus familiarly by his Christian name, out of the great gratitude for her not being a bit glad to see Mr. Poynter. He is not a bit in love with pleasant Madge, as has been stated before. And he is very much in love with dark, winsome Olive; but for all this he would not like Madge's inclinations, or fancy, or whatever one may call it, to go straying off in the direction of "any other fellow"—whether that fellow were an old friend or not.

For the first half hour after this meeting, it does seem very much as if Mr. Poynter meant to commit the gross error of attempting to monopolize Madge. The fact is, rich young squire and landed proprietor as he is, he is intensely shy, and doubtful as to his own merits. He knows full well that he has not the easy go of graceful satisfaction with himself, which is a pre-eminently distinguishing mark of the impecunious Philip. And so Griffiths Poynter frequently suffers himself to drift to some point socially, where he is at a disadvantage and neglected.

The smooth, supple, perfectly self-possessed young man of society without a sou—takes the lead in the most natural way possible, before the young lord of some of the neighboring soil, who has been made an idol of in his own family, and never roughly handled by fortune all his life, Philip (unconsciously, it must be confessed) adopts an air of patronizing tolerance to the interloper—who owns the property and right of fishing here, and from whom Madge has never deemed it worth while to ask for a ticket for her friend Philip. And so, presently seeing that Mr. Poynter is being cast into outer darkness through sheer carelessness, generous Olive tears her attention from Philip, and bestows it and a few words on Griffiths Poynter.

It is in the nature of this young man to reciprocate speedily and warmly. If a dog wags his tail at Griffiths, that dog is sure of a kindly pat or a bone. If a cat purrs at him in the fawning, false way in which the sweet, deceitful creatures do purr

when it pleases them, he strokes it, and very frequently gets scratched. And if a woman shows him any favor, he accepts it as a courtier might a kiss from a queen.

Now it must be told that in spite of that declaration of Miss Madge's made the other day to Philip, that she "has never had a lover," Griffiths Poynter has "cared for her," to use his own temperate uneffusive language, ever since she was a frisky Fenella-like child, and he a big, florid, handsome, strong, courageous, awkward boy. He went on craving for her during his youthhood, or hobbledehoyhood. And now in his young manhood the fondness has deepened, strengthened, intensified itself into love—into love that he has not told yet, save with his honest bright-blue eyes (the very homes of candor and simplicity), which invariably open wide and let out all their secrets whenever they rest on Madge.

But Madge has not tried, not cared to, not thought of reading their secrets yet. Heart whole, Madge looks upon him as a trusty, tried, amiable, human mastiff, whom it is good to have within call. While as for him, up to the hour of their meeting by the river, on this he would have cut his heart up for her, or given up hunting, or committed any other appalling sacrifice that can be mentioned.

Mrs. Henderson, from the heights of her own experience, sits and watches this quartette, and sees clearly that they will not, that they can not sing in harmony much longer. She knows well (few know better, indeed) how one can "love and unlove, and forget; fashion and shatter the spell," but still she does pity and fear for those four young people. For she thinks of Olive Aveland. "She is getting to love him for his cousin's sake, and if she shows her love to him, oh! my poor Madge."

As they walked home late in the afternoon, a blessed boulder does compel Philip to place himself close to Olive for a minute, and he whispers:

"What could induce you to lay yourself out to please that yokel, that yeoman, that?"

"Why don't you call him only a clod at once," she says, impatiently; "how can you be so ill-natured and unjust?"

And then all her agony of the last few hours is wafted away in a moment, as he mutters, in a sulky, hopeless way:

"Because I love you, and can't help myself!"

And as he says it he has to take Olive's hand in his, because the riverside-path has become a mere big boulder jutting over the stream at this junction, and with that hand lying lightly, unresistingly in his, why he would be more or less than Philip were he to resist the impulse to press it.

She skims along over enchanted space for a brief time, and then Madge and Griffiths Poynter drop back, for the path has widened, and Griffiths can't help wishing to talk a little more to that "fair," unaffected, good-natured girl in buff, who saved him from the utter confusion of feeling himself superfluous just now; and Olive, without a thought of the evil she is doing, out of an excess of happiness that has been generated in her heart by that last boulder episode, talks to him freely, easily, almost gayly, and leaves him to think her kind, and good, and beautiful, and almost equal to Madge.

And Mrs. Henderson has a dim perception that something is growing which she never planted or desired to plant; and is not quite sure as to what it is, and feels that on the whole she will not be altogether sorry when this excellent, dear, handsome, fascinating Philip has gone off to work the vein of good fortune which her husband has struck for him.

At the Vicarage gate, Madge, who treats Mrs. Henderson with the free, affectionate insolence of a daughter, darts back to whisper, "Do ask Griffiths to dinner: I think he is taken with Olive." And so Griffiths is asked to dinner too, and goes in radiant and ruddy, "his eyes and face almost matching his sky-blue tie and Ruby pin," Olive notices. And his light yellow hair has a sheen upon it that oil, and oil only, gives. And altogether no one could think of pronouncing this stalwart young rustic Apollo good form.

But through that merry dinner and long friendly evening, Olive Aveland is very kind to him, and attentive to him. She does not do these things

with design; but the fact is, she has herself winced and smarted under neglect a good many times during the last few years. And knowing how it hurts, she cannot put a fellow-creature to the pain wittingly. So in the midst of her tumultuous, almost mad joy (she has drugged her scruples to rest) at the good fortune which Mr. Henderson has announced to Philip, she has time to give kindly words and looks to Griffiths Poynter.

Is she not a woman?

They sit listening to the low sweet music that Olive is making for them without other light in the room than the faint light of stars. And in the semi-darkness and under cover of the nocturns she is playing, Philip approaches Olive. It is his way to do everything easily and gracefully, and without attracting surprised attention. There are no rough edges about any part of his manner. So now the others do not notice it when he lounges on a low ottoman by the end of the piano, and whispers:

"I must see you alone to-morrow?"

In the tremulous notes that follow, he reads acquiescence to his request. And he rewards her characteristically.

"Darling!" he whispers, and then rises up and makes way for Mr. Poynter, as the lamp is brought in.

"And now Madge must sing," Mrs. Henderson says, for she feels as if Madge were being overshadowed by this display of musical proficiency on Miss Aveland's part, and Madge, who has a voice that is rich and soft as buttermilk, sings "Kathleen Mavourneen" with such sympathy and expression, that the tears well up into Mr. Poynter's eyes, and he has to give a series of little short coughs in order to prevent them running down his cheeks, as he thinks what a sad day it will be for him if he ever has to say farewell, "it may be for years or forever," to Madge Roden.

CHAPTER VII.

MRS. WILMOT'S VIEWS.

"Sweet is true love, tho' given in vain, in vain."

As they are parting this night Philip Fletcher slips a card into Olive's hand, and when she gets to her room and dares to look at it, she sees inscribed thereon:

"I will be at the end of the lawn nearest to the wilderness to-morrow at twelve."

And she presses the card to her bosom, and kisses it, and performs a variety of absurd antics about it, such as first putting it in a casket—presently withdrawing it from there, because the casket has no lock—putting it in her purse and taking it out again, because she fancies the filthy lucre may defile it—and finally tearing it up into minute pieces, because she fears it may fall into the hands of some prying servant.

As she finishes tearing it up Madge comes in, and Olive experiences one of those qualms of guilt which one does experience when anything like a secret—however unimportant it may be—has to be maintained.

There is rather a perplexed look on Miss Roden's face as she puts her candle down, and there is an unwonted degree of hesitation in her manner as she says:

"Olive, dear, I have had such a funny note from Mrs. Wilmot."

"Oh, have you?" Olive says, carelessly for her head and heart are both so full of Phillip that she cannot give any consideration to anything or anybody with whom he has no concern just at present.

"So odd of her to write to me," Madge goes on rather testily, and then she hands Mrs. Wilmot's letter to Olive, and politely withdraws her observation from her friend during the reading.

The letter is written with a pin apparently—the lines are all so sharp and hard, and there is so little ink in them, and the words prick so as Olive reads them. The letter is a request that Miss Roden will kindly fix a day and hour for an interview with Mrs. Wilmot, who wishes to say a few words to her on the subject of Miss Aveland's incomprehensible conduct.

"It's the most insolent letter I ever heard of," Madge says rather hotly when Olive has finished it, "as if you had any need to have consulted her before you came to my house—for I suppose that is your offense."

Olive is only a girl, and she does shrink with a girl's undefined fear and dread from any stone that may be thrown at her reputation. Her lips quiver a little as she says:

"I suppose I was injudicious in allowing Mr. Fletcher to walk home with me the other night when I was in lodgings."

"Injudicious! and he such a friend of mine," Madge protests, "what nonsense, what utter nonsense!" and Olive says, "Ah! but everyone doesn't know that, you see," and sighs, and would rather have the sharpest stones thrown at her reputation than hear that Philip is "such a friend" of Madge's.

"If she even hints at anything so impertinent, you won't stay with her a day, will you, Olive?" Madge says eagerly, and Olive shakes her head and says she can't tell what she may do yet. For hope tells a bright tale to her as she remembers that to-morrow she is going to see Philip alone.

Conversation flags between the two girls after this. Madge, without well knowing why, is mortified a little that her new friend, Philip, should so unconsciously have compromised her old friend Olive by that trifling act of attention. Of course, it is simply ill-nature on Mrs. Wilmot's part, but Madge feels that it would sting her to hear that Philip was dubbed a flirt, however undeservedly. And while she is resolving these possibilities in her mind, Olive is employed in plotting how to make her escape to-morrow at twelve.

Just as she is leaving Olive's room, Madge recollects something.

"Oh! what do you think of Griffiths Poynter?"

Olive strives to remember what she does think of him. She can only recall one portion of her opinion, which she gives utterance to.

"I think he looks very healthy," she says.

"And very kind," Madge puts in, hurriedly; "if I had a sister, I should like dear old Grif for a brother-in-law. I'd rather see anyone I loved married to Grif than to anyone else in the world, I think." And as Olive only says "Ah!" to this, the conversation comes to a dead-lock, and the girls say "good-night."

There is a rustic bench planted well into a space that has been cut away for it in the midst of a laurel hedge at the end of the Moorbridge lawn. The laurel hedge divides the lawn from this wilderness; and through this wilderness Philip Fletcher makes his way about twelve o'clock—makes his way to the meeting with Olive, which he himself has petitioned for.

As he walks along, a passer-by would probably take him for a spoiled, silky, curled darling of fortune. It is his way to look in such a much better case always, than he is in, in reality. For instance, now he is not happy or satisfied by any means, although Fate, working through Mr. Henderson, has put the means of competence, if not of wealth, within his grasp.

Unscrupulous as he is deemed, unscrupulous as he is in many respects, he does hang back and hesitate about accepting his good fortune, which he has won under false pretenses. Who can tell where the point of honor is with such a man? He does not hesitate or scruple (much) about winning Madge's heart and wealth under false pretenses. But when it comes to a matter of business—to a dealing between man and man—he loaths his false colors and he is strongly tempted to haul them down.

But "in the case of a man who has once gone astray, the daws peck so fiercely and freely at the heart he may at any time afterward wear on his sleeve," he thinks. And so, though he has nearly proclaimed himself to be what he is this morning to Mrs. Henderson, he has faltered and fallen back, and only succeeded in puzzling that good woman intensely.

To complicate matters still further, Mrs. Henderson has more than hinted to him this morning that she greatly lacks patience with men who "fear their fate too much." She, in her blind belief in Madge's superiority to every other created being, thinks that Philip is so dazzled by Madge's worthy merits, that he quite forgets his own. And so she more than hints at broad disapprobation of men who are laggards in love. And he with a vision of Olive dancing before his eyes, and with a sharp stinging recollection of that cousin of his whom he is robbing of the mess of pottage so carefully

and liberally prepared, feels his tongue tied, and his mind a moral chaos.

He wishes now with all his heart, that he had not proposed this secret meeting to Olive. For the fascination of Olive is upon him overpoweringly as of old, he has no faith in his own fidelity to her. His love would never stray from her, but his vows would, for his fortunes are too precarious altogether for him to dare to neglect the certain good, the security, the power that would accrue to him through Madge Roden.

But in spite of all these low calculations, all these pettifogging doubts and fears, he looks a very exalted being indeed in Olive's eyes, as he comes up to the bench half hidden in the laurels, on which she is trying to sit as if she had not been there for half an hour waiting impatiently for him. Olive is making a shallow pretense of reading, but in the presence of the real, living, breathing, cruelly-absorbing romance that is before her, the shallow pretense falls away, the book slips from her hand, and she rises up to greet him with far too much gladness in her eyes and voice.

For a few moments they sit there side by side, each trying to seem easy and natural, and altogether as if they had met there by accident, and each failing signally. During those few moments Olive gets horribly vivid, painfully acute, impressions of everything surrounding her. She is so highly strung that she feels the soft, tremulous motion of the leaves over her head vibrating through every fibre of her body. She feels her heart ticking like an ill-regulated clock; and a stray sunbeam shimmering on the path before her, dazzles her into speculating as to whether that same sun will go down this day upon her happy love.

What she would give—how she longs—to let her head droop on the broad, strong shoulder by her side. He has been false as the mirage, and fickle as the public taste to her, and she has every reason to believe that he is these things still, and that he will never be any other. And yet, knowing and feeling this, she yearns for the slightest sign of loving interest from him—she covets every kindly look and word he may ever have given or ever will give to another woman. And a woman who surrenders her heart thus utterly, must always be at a disadvantage.

On the authority of one who was "a poet and a lover too," we are taught that

"Woman's heart is made
For minstrels' hands alone;
By other fingers played
It loses half its tone."

Philip Fletcher has no pretensions to the minstrel's art; but the victor in the Battle of the Bards himself would have failed in getting a fuller and more thrilling tone out of this special woman's heart than he (Philip) is getting. And so at last when he says:

"Well, Olive, we didn't come here to tell each other that it's a fine day, and that the autumn tints are richer than the spring ones," and holds his hand out to her at the same time, she puts hers into it and straightens the figure that had been drooping a moment before, and feels that this is enough—enough to recompense her for any amount of past agony.

"However it goes with me, Olive—however dark and uncertain my future may be, I shall feel it less if I know you're well and happy." And he bends forward as he speaks, and wins her more with one of those ardent, fervent glances from the dark-blue eyes in which she sees her heaven and her hell.

"Well and happy," the girl repeats, tempestuously; "it's so easy to link the two words together. I'm well enough. I haven't a headache or a toothache; I've only"—she pauses on the brink of the declaration that she has only a heartache. The saving remembrance that it is his proud prerogative to woo her with such statement, not hers to woo him, checks her, and she substitutes the words:

"I've only a wretched feeling of uncertainty about me just now; Mrs. Wilmot has 'done with my services' rather abruptly this morning."

"Why?" he asks, eagerly. Then he goes on without giving her time to answer him: "Never mind, Olive; you don't mind, do you, my child? Yours should have been such a much brighter lot;

it's one of the things that a man can't think of—when he can do nothing."

The saving clause informs her rather fully of his present state of mind, and she realized that some selfish consideration has battled successfully with the love that is passion for herself. She strangles a sob as she answers:

"I'd rather not talk of myself, please; tell me what you are going to do?"

"On my honor, I don't know," he answers, involuntarily; "make a clean breast of it to Mrs. Henderson, I think—tell her that I came down for a lark, and renounce the honors that are offered me."

She heaves a sigh. "I verily believe they would be re-offered to you in your own proper person then," she says, thinking the while with quickened pulses of how courageous Madge Roden would respond to the touch of bravery there would be in this man's confessing him and risking a topple. Thinking of how Madge would respond, and of how tempting a response from Madge would be, she adds:

"Miss Roden will persuade Mrs. Henderson to be very merciful."

"Do you think she will trouble her head about me, when I have dubbed myself impostor?"

"Yes," Olive cries, in her jealousy, suffering the truth to be wrung from her. "You'll let her believe that it was for her sake you did it, and—and I know what she will feel." Then she nerves herself to learn the worst without further delay, and says:

"Look here, Philip; if you ever had a spark of love for me, don't, when you're everything to Madge Roden, let her know that you have ever been anything to me." Then she tries to talk cleverly about it, in weak endeavor to save some portion of woman's traditional dignity.

"We have played at being many things—at being in love—at being indifferent—at being jealous—at being strangers—at being interested in that way in one another still. Now let us leave off play, and in serious, sober earnest, be friends, nothing more."

"Has it been play?" He has risen up and now stands before her, one hand thrust into his pocket, the other clasping her shoulder, to steady her and force her to front him. "Has it been play? by Heaven, no! It's been such desperate earnest as you'll never care to inspire in—as you never can feel for any man again."

With all his faults he is such a lover as few women can resist loving.

"Has it been play?" she moans out after him. "Oh, Philip, how much better you know than I do, whether it has or not; but I don't wish to talk of myself; I only wish to talk of you. What are you going to do?"

He shrugs his shoulders with a great air of giving up all things, and Olive says, sapiently:

"That will do no good; you're not the man to say 'Can't help it,' or 'Things must take their course,' especially now that you have the ball at your feet."

"What are you going to do?" he asks, suddenly.

"I? Oh, I am going whither fate wafts me," she answers, making a gesture as though she flung her future to the winds. "Mrs. Wilnot having given me a bad name, it will cling to me, probably, and when next you see me, Philip (if you ever do see me again), perhaps I shall be so very much in the shade that you will deem it due to your own respectability to cut me; I shall not be in the least surprised."

He ponders for a few moments, and can't make up his mind as to how he can make his will agree with expediency. Then he takes another false step as the impulse to take that reproachful-looking, loving girl in his arms and kiss her, overcomes him.

"Be true to me, Olive, though I can't claim you openly yet," he mutters in the fullness of that grasping spirit of his, which cannot bear to relinquish any thing that comes in his path. And Olive for one minute struggles against her own infatuation, and her prophetic spirit lashes her into the utterance of an angry truth, as she replies:

"You will never claim me openly, Philip. I know that well enough; why should I bind myself

down to be true to you, when you provide against any unpleasantness through being false to me?"

"So you won't trust me again?" he pleads.

"Trust you? No!"

"Then only love me, darling," he says, lowering his voice in a way that proves him an adept in the art of winning, and she acknowledges, impatiently:

"I can't help doing that—to my sorrow," and then adds, as the wonderful yearning to be near him comes over her—the yearning which only a woman in love can understand: "When shall I see you again, Philip?"

"If I only consulted my own wishes, darling, I should say daily and hourly; but I have your welfare to think of, Olive, as well as my own, and so I must tell you that it must depend on circumstances."

"Philip," she cries out, sharply, "I'm trusting you again so foolishly; you won't flirt—you won't seem to love anyone but me when you're away from me, will you?"

It is easy to say "No" to this, so he says "No" with an immense air of sincerity. And while he holds her hands, and searches the depths of her eyes with that seeking, devouring glance of his, she believes him.

CHAPTER VIII.

"THOSE WHO HAVE NOTHING LEFT TO HOPE, HAVE NOTHING LEFT TO DREAD."

VIVIDLY, more vividly was the majority, who only mark her calm demeanor would give her credit for, does Mrs. Henderson remember the days of her youth and the luxury of love excitement that filled them.

She is, as she herself told Olive the other day, a happy wife and mother now; but she has not forgotten the days when other lips and hearts than Mr. Henderson's told tales of love to her. And Philip Fletcher judges wisely in deeming her a fitting recipient of some of his doubts and difficulties.

For she is that rare combination, a patient, clever, impulsive, sympathetic, clear-headed, warm-hearted woman. And "she's but a contradiction still," for being all these excellent things, she is nevertheless weak enough to attempt to work out what she considers a scheme of perfect matrimonial felicity between her two favorites, Madge and Philip.

It must be borne in mind, before her conduct is tried and found wanting, that though she has been spoken of as a friend of old Mrs. Fletcher's, that she is considerably Mrs. Fletcher's junior. The gulf of years indeed between the two women, makes her a far more sympathetic and congenial companion to Mrs. Fletcher's suppositious son, the Philip with whom we are dealing.

Her mood is specially good for the reception of a confidence, now as Philip comes leisurely into her presence, after the interview with Olive, of which the chief details have been given. Her mood is specially good for the reception of a confidence, and the instinct of a woman tells her that she is to be the recipient of one as soon as she catches a glimpse of the young man.

All the daily duties that must be done, have done themselves, as it were, easily this morning. Her cook has been moderately intelligent, and not actually immoderately extravagant in her demands on the butcher during the last week. Her conservatory, to which she attends chiefly herself, has been well supplied with water. Her pet flowers are in their best bloom. Her daughters have just settled down comfortably with a new daily governess, and her dear little friend Madge Roden has been with her for an hour, talking a great deal, and blushing a little about Philip.

Yes, it has come to this. Madge has reached the stage, when, without being actually in love, without feeling that for a certainty, and, in very truth, the hero of her life has come to her, she blushes and feels flatteringly that in a measure she has a right in him, when she hears the sound of Philip's name. He is miles ahead of the dear, trusted, old friend of her youth, Griffiths Poynter, in her own estimation, for he has that trick of taking a woman's liking without exerting himself which cannot be defined.

Mrs. Henderson is remembering the days of her youth very vividly as Philip comes into that little

room of hers which she has boarded off from the big corridor, and decorated according to her own taste. She is remembering these days, not remorsefully, not regretfully, but clearly and vividly for Madge's sake. And, as she is remembering them, and determining to be very tolerant to any hesitation on the part of the man Madge is learning (has learnt?) to love, for fear anything like intolerance should confirm that hesitation, and cause him to ride away though he loves; while she is determining on this course, he comes in, and the kind, languid, clever eyes that meet his see at once that the crisis is come.

There is a fullness, a steadiness, a quiet power in Mrs. Henderson's manner that makes it a very reassuring one to any weaker vessel. Philip feels himself to be the weaker vessel now, as he takes a stool that happens to be at her feet, and begins by saying:

"I wish I had come under your influence ten years ago."

She smiles, for the implied flattery is pleasing to her, married woman as she is. Albeit, married woman that she is, she knows it means nothing, and she answers, half deprecatingly:

"Ah, Philip! so many men say that, feeling sure that the influence which might have run counter to their wishes can never be brought to bear upon them now."

In her kind, grand, half elder-sisterly, half-coaxing way, she leans forward and offers him her hand, and adds:

"But I feel as sure of this, Phil, as I feel sure I love your mother, my influence will never be brought to bear upon you badly. I shall only urge you forward in a good path."

For half a second more he hesitates, then all the manliness, all the good that is in him asserts itself, and he rises to his feet, looking very grave and miserable, and says:

"I have swindled you out of this interest—but, for Heaven's sake, don't withdraw it."

And then, clearly and humbly, he tells her all the story of his temptation, his trial, and his inglorious success.

By the time it is told, her eyes are full of tender tears, and her face is quivering with intense compassion. "Poor fellow!" she believes firmly—the whole tone of his narrative has led her to believe—that, though "a lark" brought him here under false colors, love has chained him here.

She likes him very much, this handsome, glorious young fellow, who likes her so well that he trusts her thoroughly. She likes him very much, and so she argues with herself; that as they have all liked him for himself hitherto; to the full as much as they have liked him because they believed him to be somebody else, so no harm can be done by suffering things to go on as they are for a while, at any rate. Moreover, he is young, and his youth and pleasantness, and his regard for herself, and her recollection of how tenderly his aunt and all his cousins felt for him; all these considerations step in and make her pitiful, to a dangerous degree, toward him.

The impulse to be thoroughly honorable and truthful is upon the good-looking good-for-nothing now. Still sitting low at her feet (he argues rightly that if she had been very much displeased with him she would have made him quit that position of proud humility), he goes on to appeal more fully to her mercy, and to cast himself more entirely upon it.

"I'll be quite honest at last," he says; "the temptation to take that jolly berth has never been an overpoweringly strong one; I've felt, from the moment you told me of it, that I could resign it to the right man—to dear old Phil—without a pang. But the temptation not to risk losing your friendship, and Miss Roden's, has been stronger than any third person can understand, perhaps."

As he says this, he gives her one of those questioning, eager looks that are so infinitely useful in bringing about his own ends. And out of the depth of her generous belief in his best, she says:

"If I have any influence with Madge, Philip, you will not lose her friendship; she will appreciate your free resignation of a thing that would have been very valuable to you as highly as I do, I hope; for it would be the heaviest loss that you could have, if you lost Madge Roden's liking."

Her words are so plain, her meaning is so obvious, that he is compelled to answer her in an outright manner that he never contemplated when he commenced his confession. His passionate love for Olive recedes before his ambitious excitement about Madge.

"It was the description I'd had of Madge Roden that tempted me down here to make a fool of myself," he says, gloomily; "and now that I have made a fool of myself, the conviction that I'm no more worthy of her than the ass was of Titania, is my greatest punishment."

The thought of Madge growing haggard, careworn, pallid, plain, under the influence of disappointed love for this "young fellow, whose worst fault has been a reckless desire to know Madge at 'any price,'" fills Mrs. Henderson's mind, and weakens it.

"What if she thinks you worthy, Philip? Your cousin can never be as dear to us now as you are; because you feel bound to resign an appointment that is offered to you under a mistake, you needn't resign every other good that you've gained during your sojourn among us."

"Have I gained her?"

"I can't say that, but I will say that you ought to give her the open assurance that she has gained you; if you don't do it I shall have my want of wisdom brought home to me cruelly."

Her voice trembles, and she looks altogether rather more "upset" than he had ever imagined cool, clever Mrs. Henderson could look. What a fate! What a girl this is that is almost offered to him! And after all, he has not pledged himself to Olive! Only he loves her.

But when "love" is suffered to be the lord of all, Real Life very often ends in a desperate heart-rending struggle with every-day necessities. And Olive may do so much better with her beauty, and her brains! And how heartily he'll hate the fellow who gets her eventually, if he loses her—for there is still an "if" between Olive and the renunciation of her.

By-and-by Mr. Henderson comes in with his boots wet, and his spirits a trifle weary. He has had a long round in the parish this afternoon, and he is not exactly in the mood to balance Philip's claims to toleration fairly.

"It seems to me that the young man has sold her, and humbugged us all, my dear," he says to his wife, who is making the best of Philip's case through the open dressing-room door. And she is obliged to acknowledge that he has done both these things, and that still she likes him, and means to stand by him.

"It was simply that he might make friends whom he would never have had the chance of knowing if he hadn't done it," she urges, and though her argument is loose, her face is so eloquent that Mr. Henderson refrains from banning Philip with book and bell, and consents to sit down and dine with him.

By the time that dinner is over the offender's offenses seem to have become family property, and Mr. Henderson looks upon them with very kind eyes. He will have no further trouble or responsibility about the appointment, for Philip renounces it utterly and entirely, and responsibility and trouble outside the parish are things that Mr. Henderson is beginning to shrink from.

So Philip floats in a calm harbor of refuge, quite safe and comfortable for the time, but very uncertain as to either his safety or comfort directly he ventures out of it. Feeling that it would be very sweet to write to Olive, and sweeter still to get one of those open-souled notes of hers in reply, notes in which she throws down her cards as only a trusting, loving girl who is void of all mean suspicion can.

But sweet as this would be, it would be dangerous sweetness for him to taste at this juncture. And so he sends no written balm of Gilead to the poor girl who is thrillingly conscious of the hopelessness and helplessness of her case.

Her instincts tell her to get away from Moorbridge House, and get away from this neighborhood, as soon as possible. But practical need opposes her instincts. Mrs. Wilmot has "renounced Miss Aveland's services as governess, not deeming Miss Aveland a fit person to be intrusted with the charge of young and impressionable girls." So Mrs. Wilmot takes care to tell everyone she meets

in a way, with a fullness of suppressed meaning, which induces everyone to question "Wherefore?" Then Mrs. Bale's tale of the midnight ramble "with Miss Madge's gentleman" is repeated and repeated again until it loses all resemblance to the original statement, and poor Olive is regarded as a very black sheep.

Poor Olive really does not know where to go, for the fraction of stipend she has to draw from her late employer is too small to be wasted on unnecessary traveling expenses. Accordingly, though her taste revolts at thus staying on near her lover while her lover outwardly ignores her, she is compelled to do so, at Madge's earnest invitation, for a few days, while she searches the columns of all the daily papers for something that may suit her, or rather for something that she may suit.

And Philip, the while, comes and goes and is freely welcomed always by Madge, and seems to be nearer and dearer to Mrs. Henderson than before, although he has not availed himself of the good service that lady has done him through her husband and her husband's brother. A sort of undefined estrangement seems to be springing up between Philip and Olive, and he abstains from telling her that he has made a clear breast of it to Mrs. Henderson.

So a few more suns rise and set upon this state of affairs, without there being any outward variation. Only Madge knows, and Olive guesses with sharp pain, that Philip is becoming the one absorbing object of interest in the world to the girl whose heart will never be treated as a worthless toy, as poor Olive's has been.

In very truth, the ease and comfort, the peace and plenty, and power, which are all represented fully by Madge's favor, are proving too strong temptations to him. It would be mere feeble cruelty, he argues, to unite himself with Olive now. She is not the kind of girl to try love in a garret, and living on potato peelings with. Fettered by a penniless wife, he would surely be a penniless man all his life. And when the halo of romance died away (how brief its life would be), she might in justice reproach him with having indulged his selfish passion at the cost of all the comfort of her life! No; it behooves him to guard her against herself—against the countless minor miseries that crop up in the matrimonial path, on nothing a year. His folly was culpable enough, so far as it had already gone, as regarded Olive. But if he suffered it to go on to the end he had weakly led her to anticipate the other day, it would become criminal! That his sufferings would be equal to hers was a fact that, surely, proved him blamelessly unselfish in the course he intended to pursue? It was for her sake as much, nay, more than his own, that he would make an end of this love that was so sweet—and so bitterly hopeless.

Arguing thus with himself, his conduct soon ceases to appear faulty. Indeed, it speedily assumes a rather lofty aspect in his own eyes. Girls rarely consider consequences; it is the part of the men to be prudent, and to protect the imprudent ones from themselves.

So the days go on, Olive becoming almost hourly more anxious-eyed, more pitifully desirous of hearing more loving words from Philip. And Madge almost hourly becoming more and more convinced that in him she has found her hero and her fate.

He has spoken openly and rather carelessly to Mrs. Henderson of his former acquaintance with Olive. Spoken of it in a free and unembarrassed way, that shows Mrs. Henderson that he has never reciprocated the beautiful brunette's evident predilection for him. And when he has told Mrs. Henderson this, and succeeded in giving her this impression, he firmly believes that all his difficulties about Olive are at an end. Firmly believes that when he has counseled her for their common good to go away and forget him, that it will be all plain sailing with Madge, and that he will never hanker after the girl he loves and means to renounce.

Then comes a day soon when he must needs expound his views to Oliver. For a situation offers which she feels bound to accept; she is to be a companion to the young wife of a naval officer who is ordered off on foreign service for four years, and so the night before she goes, Philip manages to see her alone once more.

"I couldn't say good-bye to you before the others," he says, as she comes up to him, in silence,

at the trysting-spot he had himself appointed. She has vowed that never again will she make one step in advance either by word or look toward this man, whom she loves better than her life. So now she stands before him with her eyes cast down, and in perfect silence.

If she would only look at him, if she would only speak, he would break the spell that is over him, and caress her even while he crushed her. But her motionlessness and her speechlessness combine to check him, to fill him with a sort of undefined awe.

"Have you forgotten that this is good-bye, Olive?" he says, in rather a choked voice; "I have a hundred things to say to you, but while you stand like an unfeeling statue before me, you chill the words off my tongue."

"I know them all; you needn't say them," she answers, in a monotone, without raising her eyes.

"You must hear me," he begins, trying to seize her hand, but she draws it sharply back, and clasps it in the other high up over her bosom.

As she stands thus, bending back a little, with slightly bent head, and tightly clasped hands, there was a wealth of hopeless love, of futile fury, of desperate anguish in her attitude! Her beauty is so glorious, her misery so tempting, that he loves her more than ever in the moment of renouncing her.

"Good-bye," she says hoarsely, after a minute. And then she turns and walks away, leaving him with all his arguments unsaid. Leaving him with his heart and brain burning—leaving him with a sense of such discomfiture upon him as he has never dreamed of experiencing about loving, devoted Olive. At the last she has triumphed!

As to her, she goes back to her room with that wofully gnawing pain in her breast which is the proud portion of the majority of women, whether they triumph or are triumphed over in this way. Goes back and packs up her things, and tries to still the ringing in her ears, and to listen to Madge's blythe, hopeful prognostications of the "better days" that must surely be in store for her—and can do nothing but feel in every fibre, in every nerve, that it is over! over! forever.

There are tears in Mrs. Henderson's and Madge's eyes the next morning when Olive bids them farewell. But Olive's eyes are dry and bright—no one knows how hot and aching they are.

"We shall miss her," Mrs. Henderson says, a little sadly, as they go back into the house, after watching the carriage out of sight round the corner of the drive. But though she says it sadly, she is rather glad than otherwise that the foreign element is removed from their coterie. It is high time that Philip and Madge should come to a clear understanding.

Philip has not come down to the house to see Olive off, but as the carriage drives rapidly through the lodge gate she sees him leaning on the railings by the side of it. And as he turns one miserable, passionate glance toward her, he sees her head droop forward on her hands, and hears the deep cry that is beaten out of her by this final blow to the hope of her life.

So for a time his path is very clear. But he can't follow it for a few hours. The whole of that day he spends in some place in the heart of the moor, where only a few stray red deer can gaze with pitying eyes on the form of a man stretched on the purple heath. And not even the red deer can see whether or not the eyes that are so closely covered with his hands are dry or full of tears.

In the evening he is at Moorbridge House; "all the better for his splendidly invigorating outing on the moor," he tells Madge. And then he whispers to her:

"Will you give me half an hour in the garden?"

She knows well what is coming, and frankly as a child might she answers:

"Yes—I will!"

CHAPTER IX.

MADGE'S TRUST.

"And indeed her chief fault was this unconscious scorn Of the world, to whose usages woman was born."

VERY gravely, almost solemnly, the young man who has always been so carelessly happy, so uncommonly *debonair*, and contented with things in

the order they are going, offers his arm to Madge, and leads her away out of earshot of the open where Aunt Lucy and Mrs. Henderson are sitting.

As the fair, gracious-looking young pair grow faint shadows in the dim light on the lawn, Aunt Lucy says, with a little sigh:

"My vocation will soon be gone."

"You wouldn't have wished her to remain as she is all the years of her life?" Mrs. Henderson says quickly; "this must come about sooner or later; and if Philip is the man, why not Philip as well as another?"

The argument is unanswerable; at any rate, Miss Roden, senior, does not attempt to answer it, she merely slips on one side of it, and says:

"I am more satisfied than I should have been if you and Mr. Henderson were not responsible for him; as it is, you both love Madge too well to have lightly wished her happiness."

For a few moments Mrs. Henderson suffers sharp pangs of doubt and remorse for her share in the transaction. Then she hastens to exonerate her husband.

"Whatever happens," she says decisively, "however this may turn out, and I do think that they love each other, and will tell each other so to-night, my husband has done nothing, either to forward or to hinder it; men are not so alert in such matters as we are; he has seen nothing of it."

"But you have seen it grow," Miss Roden says, "even I have seen it, and you're a quicker woman than I am; I've seen it, and sorrowed over it, and though I'm here to take care of the child, I've not dared to move a finger."

"Young blood will have its course," Mrs. Henderson sings, a little tremulously; "if we had moved fifty fingers it would have been just the same."

"Think of her coming back to us presently," Miss Roden goes on, with loving jealousy, "with the flush of that new interest in her face, and that young man, who's nearly a stranger, more to her than either of us! I can hardly bear to think of it. Why couldn't he have fallen in love with and married that poor friendless girl Olive; a husband would be a boon to her!"

Meanwhile Philip has led Madge out of earshot, and fought his battle. He will not weary her with tedious recapitulation or long pleading.

"I have two things to tell you," he begins, speaking rapidly, but steadily and clearly, "I am not the man you believe me to be, and I wish you to be my wife."

Whatever she may feel when these two announcements are made to her thus simultaneously, Madge Roden does not manifest any surprise; she just lifts the eyes that have a shade of bronze brown in the shade, and of almost golden radiance in the light, up to his face, and he sees that she does not recoil from him. And in spite of his craving for her money, in spite of his liking for the girl, in spite of the general dislike men have for being rejected, he is sorry for it.

There can be no going back now. Renegade as he is to his faith to Olive, renegade he must remain, for there can be no going back, no faltering, no hesitation in his dealings with this young lady. All these thoughts rush through his mind as Madge gravely scans his face, pausing before she gives her answer, yet she only pauses for a few moments. Then her answer comes:

"Before I ask you who you are, I'll promise to be your wife, Philip." And somehow this perfect trust in him, displayed so unsparingly, displayed without effort or appeal on his part, touches him to a deeper repentance than he has ever felt in his life before.

Madge is not a girl to deal in half measures. Having waited and been very watchful over her own heart for what she believes to be a long time, and having at last discovered what she believes to be genuine love for him in it, she is ready to pour out all its treasures freely upon him now; ready to acknowledge him openly before all the world as the real happy Prince for whom she has waited in her enchanted palace.

He finds it easy enough to tell all his story now to the girl who so quietly accepts the situation of being the sharer of his life, his prospects, and his thoughts. He tells how hearing of her fired him with the desire to come down and win her. And

as he refrains from telling her why he desired to win her, she finds she cannot be a severe censor about that bit of lax morality, and he winds up by telling her that for the last ten days Mrs. Henderson has known him as he is, and has remained his staunch friend despite that knowledge.

"I thought there was something below the surface when you wouldn't take that appointment," Madge says, and she thinks that there was something very noble in that act of abnegation on the part of a man who was often in dire need of a shilling; for Philip Fletcher is not guilty of a folly of seeking to seem better or richer than he is, before this girl who is taking him upon trust so thoroughly, but who, for all that entire reliance, has the wit to find out everything she pleases.

"I have just seventy pounds a year of my own, and I have never had the knack of keeping any situation more than a couple of months," he tells her, with an uneasy laugh, for the confession implies that he must be content to owe all to her in the future; but Madge spares his pride prettily in her answer:

"What a lucky thing that I have so much, isn't it, Philip?" Then (she is a mere girl still, full of romantic generosity and high feeling) she goes on to say, "You will never crush me by seeming to remember that it was mine before yours, will you, Philip?"

"Your friends will probably spare me the trouble, Madge; on the face of it the look of the thing is against me, or would be against me," he hastily corrects himself, "if you were not such a fascinating little thing that no man could be with you without losing his head, and forgetting his fortunes."

So he babbles on, as men will do to girls to whom they are professing affection, whether they are feeling it very strongly or not. And Madge likes the novel sensation of listening to authorized declarations; and hanging with both her hands on the arm that only she has a right thus to lean, she feels contented, and wouldn't change her Philip, who has won her in disguise, "like a knight of old," she thinks, for an army of honest adorers like Griffith Poynter.

As they go back to the room where the lamps are burning now, and the moths hovering about the same with suicidal recklessness, and the two ladies waiting for what they each feel sure of, with every degree of satisfaction, Madge behaves unconsciously quite like the young queen of a rich realm about to raise a prince of inferior station to a share in her throne. She has been sovereign lady all her life, it comes quite in the order of things that she should act as a sovereign lady now at this crisis; there is no bashful hanging back, no waiting for the man to make the announcement; it almost seems to both the aunt and the friend, that she leads Philip forward as she says:

"We have come to ask you for your congratulations, for we are engaged to each other!"

Miss Roden feels a thrill of satisfaction in the midst of her aggrieved sensations; it shows that Madge realizes fully that she is the one conferring the greater honor. Old Miss Roden is a kind-hearted, rather liberal-minded woman about most things; but just about this one matter of marrying and giving in marriage, she is inclined to be very hard on, and illiberal to, the men, not one of whom has ever chosen her. Theoretically Madge has always stood out for there being complete equality in matrimony, when two hearts are joined together. But this practical betrayal of the fact that she felt herself to be the most important element in this special arrangement, "is more to be relied upon," her far-seeing relative thinks.

And Mrs. Henderson marks that little act of leadership, and though she knows it is unconscious, she feels more sorry to see it than she has ever been to see any act that Madge has ever committed in her life before; for she knows that if Madge does not resign the reins, they will be wrested from her, and she gains this knowledge from Philip's face as Madge is making her announcement.

However, all is happiness and harmony to-night. The young people talk over their plans and intentions in moon-lighted corners, and servants rush about and serve the elders with a sort of smirking

alacrity that proves they know very well the determination their young mistress has arrived at. These latter, by-the-way, begin to hope already that "he" will know his place and remember that they are beholden to Miss Madge, and not to him!

Altogether this future, for which Philip has played falsely and foresworn Olive, does not look too fairly before him for poetical justice!

The Fletcher family of Chelsea hear of and rejoice in the ne'er-do-well's good luck presently, though they shake loving, disapproving heads over the way in which that good luck has been compassed.

And Philip the genuine, Philip the hard-worked, Philip the cousin of Madge's future husband, having earned a holiday at last, promises to spend it at Halsworthy.

It is market-day at Winstaple, and Winstaple is only five miles from Halsworthy, so the Halsworthy people frequently drive over there on market-days, for the pleasure apparently of meeting each other out of their own parish. Madge has a pair of splendidly smart-stepping cobs which she drives in a little wagonette, and on this special market-day she takes them along under a bright autumnal sun at a rapid rate into Winstaple. She has adroitly substituted the wagonette for a low pony carriage—in the latter, either Mrs. Henderson or Philip would have seemed to occupy a subordinate position behind. Courtesy wouldn't have permitted Philip to let Mrs. Henderson sit there. And, inclination wouldn't have permitted Madge to let Philip sit there. His place is by her side now, and in the wagonette he can take his place naturally without any derogation from Mrs. Henderson's dignity.

Madge, it must be confessed, goes into Winstaple this afternoon with a very pleasant sense of importance upon her. The man whom all the Winstaple world will know she is going to marry is sitting by her side, and he is as handsome as a star. As she turns her cobs into the yard of the "Red Lion" they all see Griffiths Poynter dismounting from his horse, and they all remember that the last time they saw him Olive was with them, and that he seemed to admire Olive.

The burden of congratulating Madge is the heaviest one that has ever been laid upon Griffiths, but he takes it up gallantly, and comes forward, a very deep flush on his florid face, and a shimmer of hot tears in his blue eyes, and says the commonplace words:

"They tell me I have to congratulate you, Madge. I do it heartily, I'm sure." And he grips the hand he has coveted for so many years, and detests Philip with all his soul for the cool way in which that young interloper stands by and seems to take it all for granted. All involuntarily, and quite without any design of giving Philip offense he turns to the happy young lord lover and says, even while Madge is thanking him:

"And you're to be congratulated a good deal more—for we all know what Madge is."

Philip bows very stiffly and superciliously, and Madge feels annoyed with him for the first time. Out in the world, of course, they will be equal, or he may be acknowledged the superior without let, hindrance, or questions from her. But just here he needn't grudge her the honor and glory that her own subjects like to accord her.

"Dear Grif," she says, playfully, "you always thought too highly of me," and then, somehow or other, without design on the part of anyone of them, she passes out from the inn-yard into the High Street by Mr. Poynter's side.

Philip meanwhile prowling behind with Mrs. Henderson, and who from having gone through this sort of thing understands well that Madge is only bringing certain and sure retribution and tribulation upon herself. Philip, with a downcast and moody face, is less pleasant to behold than usual. If this is a specimen of the way in which Madge means to quietly assert individuality—her well-authenticated claims to being a free agent, and quite independent of the will or willfulness of others, he has made a bitter bad bargain, in spite of the Moorbridge state and the two thousand a year.

Presently he gives vent to his dissatisfaction to the lady who begins to experience the sensation of

having played with edged tools—to say nothing of fire.

"A misfortune it is for a girl to have been brought up in the wilds."

Mrs. Henderson has known other homes than Halsworthy, and has gone through a good deal in them that makes her life at Halsworthy seem faint and shadowless. But she has been the wife of the vicar of Halsworthy for many years, now, and she is too loyal a woman to hear it disparaged without a protest.

"Fortunately for us whose lots are cast here in the luxuriant West, we know nothing of the wilds where it's bad for girls to be brought up."

"I'm not speaking of the soil, but of the social barbarity of this region," he replies savagely; for Madge knows many people to-day in Winstaple, and is graciously and gladly greeting them in company with Griffiths Poynter.

"My idea is that a girl should never venture outside the barrier," he goes on as he stalks past Madge and Griffiths, who are flattening their noses against a photographer's window; "anything that calls for remark—that makes any section of the world look round, is bad style, according to my idea."

"Really" (Mrs. Henderson is fairly nettled now with her favorite. How can anyone dare to hint at a fault in you, frank, faultless Madge?), "really, I'm afraid you'll find that a very large section of the world will look round in most utter bewilderment when Madge marries you."

"Don't you throw the inequality of our fortunes in my face," he says, in a harsh tone; "if she requires a man to be the slave to her caprice, on account of it, she should have taken the bucolic by her side now; he was willing enough."

"So were you, Philip?" She says it questioningly, he notices, for he is a man who by reason of his extreme selfishness is very sensitive to the faintest shadow of a change in tone or expression.

"Can you doubt it? Is she not the load-star that drew me here? Didn't I play a very dubious part indeed, for the sake of her fair face?"

He says all this in a way that makes this staunch friend, this impetuously ardent admirer of his, feel that after all she knows very little about him. Almost in spite of herself, she had arranged in her own mind how Philip would deport himself during these difficult days of courtship. And here he was acting in a way that appeared to be utterly at variance with the nature of the man as she had known him hitherto. She did not know that all this spurious jealousy, all this apparently overweening sense of his own importance, all the capacious conduct which had succeeded his former cool calm, was the offspring of his love for and remorse about Olive. And so being ignorant of this, she failed to read the riddle Philip had become aright.

As she is wondering, for the fiftieth time, whether the laws of Nature and of Chance are not more to be trusted to work eventual good in matters matrimonial than the wiles of matron friends, quick footsteps patter behind them, and they are checked by a breathless exclamation from Madge:

"Do come back, Philip; Grif and I are going to be taken at Hamilton's, and I want you to be done too."

She would paint splendidly, he can't help seeing as he looks at her, for her bright bronze hair is blowing lightly, like a halo of cobwebs, about her chignon, and her eyes are sparkling, and smiles are dancing all over her face. But according to his taste she will photograph badly, look like a "Prairie Bird," or a "Forest Flower," or some other picturesquely untidy specimen of feminine beauty. And probably, as she ran up to him from Griffiths Poynter, she would run back to Griffiths Poynter from him. He disliked the whole tone of the episode, and showed that he disliked it in the way in which he refused to go to Winstaple's chief photographer, and be put into M. Hamilton's best position for a lover; and reproduced by the sun.

And Madge listens to his curt refusal with a heightened color; and walks back slowly with a sore feeling in her heart, and a marble wobbling about in her throat, to rejoin Griffiths at Hamilton's.

"Won't he come?" Grif asks, opening his eyes wide, and expressing wonderment all over himself,

as Madge comes into the shop with a look of mortification on her face—the first he has ever seen there.

"Philip says he has never been, and never will be photographed," she tells him briefly. And then he feels that he will, as the Americans say, have anything but "a good time" with this young lady for the remainder of the period they are doomed to spend in Hamilton's shop. He guesses the cause; the men who are left are apt to be keen about any shortcomings on the part of the men who succeed them. But though he distrusts and detests Philip for it, he reflects sagaciously that it will be anything but a policy of peace to express his distrust and detestation to Madge. So he goes on fiddling with the photographs on the counter, and feels it almost a relief when a cumbrous woman, followed by six children, comes in and greets Madge with effusion.

The whole party are carefully arranged for representation in Mr. Hamilton's best style, evidently. The lady is ample, and to-day her amplitude is magnified by a stiff silk. Her complexion is a steady, unvarying magenta, and the whites of her eyes are so yellow that they suggest acrimony and bile to all who look at them. These eyes kindle now as they rest on Madge. There is no doubt whatever that Mrs. Wilmot is delighted to see Miss Roden; so delighted that there must be a special cause.

CHAPTER X.

THE PHOTOGRAPH.

"Shall a light word part us now?"

MR. WILMOT, the husband of the lady who is regarding Madge with blithely bilious eyes, is the solicitor who manages what is called down here "the Poynter property;" therefore it is with Griffiths a matter of habit and interest, quite as much as of courtesy and feeling, to give her gracious recognition whenever he sees her, however untoward the sight of her may be.

She bows out a greeting to him now, as he makes all his features curve in a smile that is about as natural as a spurred horse's prance. He is too dejected to wish to interchange ponderous *badinage* with the lawful spouse of his legal man of business: just now, and she looks as if she had any amount of unsaid words ready to say to him. On ordinary occasions she commences conversation by saying to him:

"You haven't been near us lately, Mr. Poynter;" but she adopts another mode of salvation to-day, and says, as she gives his hand an emphatic squeeze:

"I'm sure I thought for a minute that you were Mr. Fletcher."

"You couldn't have thought so for a minute," he responds, rather gruffly, "for you only caught sight of me the instant you spoke." He feels unaccountably annoyed by the insinuation contained in Mrs. Wilmot's speech. He has a vague notion that it will annoy Madge; not fathoming the truth that Madge will never feel annoyed about Philip through anything that a third person can do or say.

At this, Madge, still looking downcast and slightly annoyed, is called away to take her place opposite to the mind-quelling instrument in front of which we have most of us passed some intensely unhappy moments. The day is sultry, Winstaple High Street is dull; and Mrs. Wilmot gets impatient as more than half an hour elapses, and still Madge does not come back to them.

"Miss Roden must be very difficult to take—or very fussy about being taken," Mrs. Wilmot says to Griffiths; and Griffiths rejoins:

"She certainly isn't fussy, but I dare say hers is a difficult face to catch correctly—it's so full of expression."

"Yes; not a good feature in it, and no repose about it," Mrs. Wilmot says, complacently surveying her own fleshy, well-settled features in the glass, "a nice-looking girl, though, to my mind; that girl who was, I grieve to say it, in charge of my children, was not a patch on Miss Roden."

He hates her for speaking of the divinity of his life as a mere "nice-looking girl;" but he hates her more for the imputation she casts upon Miss Aveland.

"I can't understand your grief in the matter of Miss Aveland," he says, looking at her sternly; and those blue eyes of his that waver, and water, and do a variety of absurd things when Madge is confusing his faculties, can look very stern indeed when mere mortals such as Mrs. Wilmot do wrong to his sense of right—"unless indeed you grieved as everyone else did, to see Miss Aveland occupying a subordinate position."

Mrs. Wilmot's pendulous purple under-lip purses itself up at this. Then she opens her mouth with a snap, and says:

"I can only say I hope, though I don't expect it, that Miss Aveland will be more prudent in future," and Griffiths feels savagely that she is referring to that midnight walk with the invincible Philip which had been well bruited abroad.

Madge comes in now, radiant, delighted with the negative which has been shown to her in relief against the coat-sleeve of the artist in a dark-closet where the smell of chemicals had made her sick. And Mrs. Wilmot instantly folds her mouth into a more amiable form, and says, ingratiatingly:

"I was going to call on you, Miss Roden, to ask you to forward something which I found belonging to Miss Aveland after she left my employ; I don't know her address, and have no desire to hold any communication with her myself."

Madge's face grows scarlet as she listens to this exposition of ill-feeling which can not be fairly fought. She puts her hand out, and takes what Mrs. Wilmot gives her, and as she does so the scarlet ebbs from her face for one moment, and then comes back in a cruelly burning wave as her eyes light on the photograph of her lover, and the words "from Philip to Olive," written underneath.

It is a cruel blow to the girl who has been so full of trust in him—and in Olive. For a few moments she quails in a way that makes Griffiths regard her wistfully, and causes Mrs. Wilmot to open her eyes in assumed surprise, and say:

"I'm afraid the heat of the studio has upset you, Miss Roden."

"No it hasn't," Madge says quickly. Then she collects herself, and (it comes so easy to Madge to be straightforward in this extremity, for it is the habit of her life) then she adds:

"I was staggered for a moment when I saw it was Mr. Fletcher's photograph; I'd forgotten that he had told me he knew Miss Aveland very well some years since: thank you, Mrs. Wilmot; I will certainly send it to her."

"She must be foolishly fond of the young man if that doesn't open her eyes," Mrs. Wilmot keeps on all the time she is sitting to Mr. Hamilton. "I'm sure, when I was a young woman, I was always up at the least slight, much less any attention to any other young lady; but la! girls in these days put up with anything to get husbands; in my time we knew what was due to us."

Meanwhile, Madge is trying to determine not only what is due to herself, but what is due to Olive and Philip. Madge is no perfect monster, and the discovery of this good and intimate understanding which must formerly have existed between her lover and her friend has nettled her more than a little, since neither of them have taken any trouble to inform her of it. But in the midst of this natural nettled feeling, there rises up a strong counter-current of belief in the liberality of the subject—of recognition of the right that each human being has to keep his or her own counsel. If a hundred girls are in possession of photographic attempts to reproduce Philip the Magnificent, what right of complaint has she? So she argues, and all the time she feels as if the photograph, and the words written underneath it, were burning holes in her pocket.

At length she decides that she will say to Philip, handing him the *carte de visite* at the same time—say as cheerfully and easily as she can:

"See here, Mrs. Wilmot found this in one of Olive's drawers after she left; I suppose you gave it to her years ago, didn't you?" say this, and leave it to him to offer any explanation he thought proper, and then forward it to Olive. Just as she comes to this decision, Mrs. Henderson and Philip come in, and clearly the mood of the latter is dark. Madge, with a wisdom that many a wife after years of experience would do well to take example by, resolves now to wait till they are home—

again; not to spoil the day for Philip, "if by any chance he should feel vexed at this likeness of himself having turned up."

"How long you have been, Madge," Mrs. Henderson begins; she is determined that all the fault-finding shall not come from Philip. The broad injustice of his complainings may not strike Madge so forcibly, if some one else indulges in them too.

"Yes, it's long tedious work being photographed, isn't it, Philip?" Madge answers wearily, for since Mrs. Wilmot shot that arrow of hers into the air, everything has been long and tedious with usually vigorous, atmosphere-absorbing Madge. She makes her appeal to Philip in a little entreating way that is new to her, for she is thinking that he may perchance be annoyed with her by-and-by, for not now at once giving him an opportunity of offering her that explanation which "really does after all" seem due both to herself and to Olive Aveland.

And he falls into the natural manly error of thinking that it is her conscience smiting her. "She feels she has outraged propriety by running all over the place with that yokel," is the way he words it to himself. He thinks it will be a good lesson to "this spoiled country-bred child," to make her feel it still more, by showing how men of the world regard such derelictions of female duty in the case of the special females who owe duty to them. Accordingly he adopts a stiffer, more reserved manner than is quite seemly even in tolerant Madge's eyes. And as they go home that evening she credits for the first time the assertion that she has frequently heard made ramblingly, that an "adoring lover may develop into a stern task-master."

But before they go home they meet Mrs. Wilmot again. At a confectioner's this time, where she is extravagantly regaling herself on the most airy of jam puffs, and economically filling up space in her children with rotund penny buns. Each young Wilmot is pastured, so to say, about the middle of a broad, brown table-land of bun when Madge and her friend go in, and they crop off the remainder hastily with a view to more, for they know well that so long as Miss Boden "stays talking to me," they may eat on with impunity.

"That dreadful woman is absolutely making her way to us, with an air of being sure of a welcome," Mrs. Henderson whispers, in comic despair, as Mrs. Wilmot surges down the middle of the shop toward the corner wherein Madge and her friends are ensconced. Whereat Madge, who feels very genuine despair at the prospects of another collision with Mrs. Wilmot while that photograph remains unexplained, unmentioned, at the bottom of her pocket, says:

"Do let us be civil to her, please," and looks shy and shattered, in a way that is quiet novel.

Mrs. Wilmot is a woman who has never in the whole course of her life done anything that is either culpably foolish or morally bad. Yet for all that she is an abomination to many people whose tents are pitched in the same region as hers.

"For," as she herself says to an enterprising fellow-laborer in the field of planting, nourishing, and cherishing many weeds that are noxious to her neighbors, "I make a point of speaking my mind, my dear, and of saying what I think; but I must say for myself that a husband of mine has never been embroiled by me." And this does not mean that she has several husbands liable to be embroiled, in stock, but that Mr. Wilmot's predecessor is resting in the grave undisturbed by any back thoughts of an "action for defamation" brought about by the lively tongue of his wife; and that Mr. Wilmot is such a pacific, well-meaning fellow, that society, at large for his sake pointedly ignores any blisters caused by the working of Mrs. Wilmot's tongue.

Madge has a piercingly keen recollection of all these attributes of Mrs. Wilmot, as she says, "Do let us be civil to her;" instinctively Madge feels that Mrs. Wilmot is aware of having her (Madge) at an advantage. "If she's awkward enough to mention it to Philip, it will be the one straw too much for this poor camel to-day," she thinks, in half-comic, half-genuine fear, and she hurriedly resolves to fly from her foe.

"Philip," she says, rising up, "I want to go and get some broad envelopes, will you come with me?"

"Ah! I thought from the likeness to the photo-

graph that this must be Mr. Fletcher," Mrs. Wilmot says, interposing her person in the path between the chairs which Madge had been about to take: "I was just going to ask for an introduction, Miss Roden."

In an agony of annoyance and embarrassment, Madge makes Mr. Fletcher known in the conventional manner to Mrs. Wilmot, and then indicates that she is ready to go on.

But Philip, out of sheer captious willfulness, affects not to see this. Madge has put him out this day, and he can't resist the inclination to punish her, even in this petty way. For some reason unknown to him, Madge evidently desires to get away from Mrs. Wilmot. Therefore, she shall be thwarted, and compelled to endure that lady's society for exactly so long a time as seems good to Philip.

"Quite a pleasure to meet so many friends and acquaintances in Winstaple, I'm sure," Mrs. Wilmot goes on, with her largest smile; "the best treat my little people have had for a long time; it's the reward I give them, Mr. Fletcher, for application to their studies; I bring them into Winstaple, and so kill two birds with one stone, as one may say, for I do my shopping, and they see a little life—so good for children to see a little life and society, you know; rubs off the rustiness which creeps over girls brought up in the country, unless they are remarkably fortunate in their governess, which we all know my children have not been."

Mrs. Wilmot shakes her head in a gloomily regretful manner, as this flood of words ceases. During the continuance of it the others had sustained that look of feeble, flickering, vague interest, which is apt to creep over any countenance when its owner is listening to one of those stories without end, interest, or incident, which an unwise majority are so fond of telling. But Madge has concentrated all her attention upon it, dreading, as each word falls, that the next will contain some allusion to that oppressive photograph.

The young Wilmots, meanwhile, having patiently plodded through the broad, dreary expanse of bun, are now taking gay little flights over the aromatic regions of lemon-cheese cakes, and citron cakes; steeped in a sweet sense, the while, of these things being forbidden joys, for their indulgence in which painless penalties will have to be paid by-and-by when their excellent mother gets them safely back into the sanctuary of their own homes.

Nevertheless, for all this full knowledge they have of the darkness of their future, they are the only happy people in the shop. For the mistress of it, though she does not dare to check their ravenous raids upon her daintiest bits of epitomised indigestion, is the slave of a dreadful doubt as to whether she will ever be paid in full or not. Mrs. Wilmot has a fine appetite, and a horrible habit of beating down every unhappy vendor of anything who may approach her. Moreover, the young Wilmots dart with such lay-like rapidity from one dish to another, that it requires a ready reckoner, indeed, to count the cost of all they devour.

"Come, Philip, I must get my envelopes," Madge says when Mrs. Wilmot's first burst of eloquence has come to a close, and Philip provokingly pauses to say:

"I won't say good-afternoon, Mrs. Wilmot, for we shall find you here when we come back, shall we not?"

"What did that woman mean by knowing me 'from my likeness to the photograph?'" he inquires as soon as they are in the street.

"Oh! I can't tell," Madge hastily ejaculates, for at that moment another batch of eager acquaintances stop her. A bevy of girls this time, who like the pattern of the jacket and tunic she wears, and so accompany her to the stationer's, and then back to the confectioner's, in order to get these garments well defined in their mind's eye, so that they may go home and "carry them out." And when they get back to the confectioner's, Mrs. Wilmot is still there, and Madge begins to realize how potent are the minor miseries of life in working wretchedness.

She stands in a little fidget now, as Mrs. Henderson settles the bill, and Philip begins to talk again to Mrs. Wilmot. The true secret of his being attracted toward this woman is to be found in

the repulsion he feels for her. She has maligned his always dearly-loved Olive, and underlying this specious courtesy of his is a deep-rooted determination to make her smart for that maligning. Additionally, he feels a certain amount of pleasure in showing that "fellow Foynter" that he (Philip) is not the slave of Madge's lightest caprice.

"I have been sending invitations out to-day to a little gathering for croquet and music next week at Rittinger," Mrs. Wilmot is saying to Philip, as Madge, who is quite transformed into "Fine ear," stands by expectant, of—she hardly knows what. "I hope we shall see you all, Mr. Fletcher; quite a pleasure, I'm sure, to make your acquaintance; photographs very inadequately represent the human face divine, as a rule, but I was prepossessed by yours the moment I saw it; good-bye, delighted to have met you all; good-bye."

They, the Halsworthy and Moorbridge House party, get out of the shop at last, and now Nemesis rushes up, overtakes and nearly crushes Mrs. Wilmot. Her healthy, hearty, hungry six have nearly cleared the counter, and she has not even the maternal felicity of feeling that what they have eaten may do them good.

A dozen trifles crop up, and make Madge defer bringing the photograph to the fore until the evening. Then she stands by him, leaning her arm on his shoulder very trustingly, as she says:

"Mrs. Wilmot found a photograph in Olive's drawer after she left; she gave it to me to forward to-day; it's of you, Philip."

Has the bolt fallen? Must he renounce the place, the position, the love, security, and fortune that Madge can give him?

CHAPTER XI.

MRS. TOLLINGTON.

"Love must cling where it can," I say

MRS. TOLLINGTON is in what she herself calls "one of her nervous states" this morning, and the cause of her being so must be briefly described.

Mrs. Tollington has been spoken of as the "young wife of a naval officer" just now; but in justice to the veracity of the parish register wherein her baptism was entered thirty-five years ago, it must be admitted that "youth" and Mrs. Tollington had seen the last of each other for some time.

But she belongs to the large army of those who dispute this ground of "youth" inch by inch with time. And in this unceasing warfare she was greatly assisted by her limped eyes, and a liquid voice, and a general air of being rather too ethereal for this work-a-day world. Her eyes and her veins are so very blue, and her long tendrils of curls are so very bright and fair and silky, and the figure (that of an evening is encased generally in a "baby-body" with the newest apologies for sleeves) is so very slender and willowy, that on the whole no one can be very much disgusted with Mrs. Tollington for calling herself a "mere girl still"—a mistaken notion which has been fostered by her marriage with a man who is, and who owns to being, sixty.

Mrs. Tollington is quite sufficiently endowed with this world's perishable wealth to be able to indulge herself in her "nervous moods," her companion (our old friend Olive), and a well-appointed house on breezy Blackheath. She has given the verdict in favor of Blackheath, for three reasons; the first is "its widely acknowledged healthiness;" the second is, her "dear sister is settled near—has married into poverty, and may need her (Mrs. Tollington's) heart-and-purse aid sometimes;" and the third is, that there is a deep and charitable joy to her in living thus well surrounded among the shabby remains of a band of people who had been powerful in her genuine girlhood, who had snubbed her when she was living in Greenwich Hospital, where her father was a lieutenant, and who "are so glad to recall their old intimacy with her," now that she is the petted wife of a man who shortly will have his flag.

The first two reasons Mrs. Tollington gives out openly to everyone who cares to listen to them, regardless of the fact of their being utterly false. The third reason she cautiously represses, regardless of the fact of its being thoroughly true. But don't think, from this exposition of her weaknesses, that she is a fool pure and simple, otherwise her

conduct will perplex you as much as it did Olive at first.

She came down to breakfast this morning in one of her "nervous states," with a white muslin and blue-ribboned dressing-gown on, and an expression of fatigued annoyance on her neat, passionless face. And as Olive noticed the expression, she inwardly girded up her soul for endurance of all that the expression portended.

"Look here, Olive," Mrs. Tollington begins, holding out an envelope that has been broken open, "that goose Maria brought this to me, and, without saying that it was addressed to you, I opened it, and out *this* tumbled" (here she hands Olive a photograph of Philip Fletcher); "and then naturally, seeing such a handsome young man, I read the letter; and when I'd done that, I found it was addressed to you. What does it all mean?"

"It means," Olive says, as steadily as the sudden vision of even this poor semblance of the never-forgotten, still-idolized old love will let her, "it means that a photograph which I left behind has been returned to me."

"Of a young man—and such a handsome young man! Is he your lover?"

With such pain, such humiliation, and such regret that he is not, Olive stammers out:

"No!"

"Then why do you look like that?" Mrs. Tollington asks, in an aggrieved tone. "I can't bear to be deceived; and when I thought I had lighted on your secret by accident, I did feel vexed that you should have kept it from Captain Tollington. I am still quite young enough for Captain Tollington to be very anxious about the friendships I form with men during his absence; and of course, if you have a lover, he will come here, and I shall see him."

"And I must live with such a woman as this!" Olive thinks. But aloud she only answers:

"Pray, don't be uneasy; the original of this is neither my lover nor my friend; he will never come here;" and her voice sinks almost to a whisper as she announces this fact, which ought to be such a satisfaction to her. Why is love, the noblest of the passions, such a promoter of lies, and double-dealing, and deceit generally? He may make men "fierce, tame, wild, and kind;" but I know that he very often makes women cowardly, cruel, and false to everyone on earth but the loved one.

"Then, being neither your lover nor even a friend, you won't mind telling me who he is?" Mrs. Tollington purrs. Mrs. Tollington likes handsome young men, and the prospects of not seeing the original of this pleasing photograph is not agreeable to her, as she had made up her mind to see him. So she asks the question with just a slight flavor of acidity (these sweet fair women always turn acid on the smallest provocation), and gives Olive to understand that it is a portion of her duty as companion to answer all questions asked by her employer.

"He is a Mr. Fletcher; and really I can tell you nothing more about him."

"Why does his photograph arrive in this impressive and mysterious way, then?"

"I can't tell you, as you have not given me time to read the note that came with it yet," Olive says, bouncing up from her seat, with her nose in the air, forgetting for the blessed period of one moment that she is in bondage, which forgetfulness on her part Mrs. Tollington carefully notes down on the tablets of her memory, with the design of showing Captain Tollington "how very foolish it is to rely on a sheep-dog who growls when her own piccadilloes are found out, and her own little game spoiled." For Olive is the child of an old friend of Captain Tollington. She is here against the wishes of Captain Tollington's fair wife; and so all these derelictions from the straight path that companions ought to follow are noted down, and treasured up in a certain store-house, where they will gain greatly in flavor and strength by the time Captain Tollington come home.

Olive goes out of the room, and can't stay to reach the sanctuary of her own bedroom before she reads the note. It is short, and unsigned; but how well she knows the peculiar turns and twists and flourishes of each capital letter! What a mixture of strength and weakness, of indecision and obstinacy, in the writing that only Philip can have penned!

No date, no address, no signature; only these words:

"Do you wish to have done with me altogether?"

There is savagery in the sentence, and she feels it; and thrills in exquisite agony in response to it. And yet, too, there is something in the savagery that soothes the pain she feels. For she knows he would not give way to it, if he did not love her still. And then she wonders "what has happened at Halsworthy since she left;" kisses the photograph that is all of him to her, and—remembers that it is her duty to go and hear what Mrs. Tollington's plans are for the day.

Shall I tell the secret of all this loving folly of which a girl is guilty, who loves with head and heart, with heat and force, as this poor Olive does? Her very cleverness, instead of being a safeguard, only increases the pain of it all. For though she knows full well that she is being made the fool of hope, whenever she lets herself hope that it will all end as she desires, still she can't help indulging in the imaginings which are destined to destroy her ultimately. Even now, as Olive goes down to her duty, there is an exultant throb at her heart, an exultant light in her eyes, an exultant color like a red flag in her cheek, as she thinks, "He can't forget me." And all these exultations drop down dead an instant after as she remembers "but he has left me."

Mrs. Tollington has a pony carriage drawn by two plump, tame, handsome, gray ponies, which she is fond of driving about well under the observation of all such of her old friends as have not these luxuries at command. She delights in making a progress down Crooms Hill, through the High Street and Hospital, well in sight of the still poor friends of her youth, who have many of them grown fat and poor, while she had still remained slim and young, and waxed rich. Oh! the joy of it—the justness and beauty of it! No wonder she forgot to think of the means by which this fitting end has been attained. No wonder that Captain Tollington, broiling for his flag under a Mediterranean sun, is rather less to his wife than the beasts that perish.

She whips her phlegmatic ponies daintily down Crooms Hill, and shrugs her neat shoulders contemptuously as she passes regiment after regiment of the same unmated beings who were girls when she was Miss Smith. And as she passes one very large sisterhood whom she knows to have done their ball-going and general showing-off duty very nobly, the fact of "it's all being a game of the sheerest chance" strikes her forcibly afresh; and she says, turning suddenly to Olive:

"Why are you not married?"

Olive is in a day-dream—a day-dream of lounging on green turf, under green trees—of love and Philip Fletcher. But she wakes from it gallantly as Mrs. Tollington asks her this, and answers with such lavish recollections of all that might have been if Philip had only been strong and true.

"Why! why, indeed!"

"Really you seem to take it very much to heart," Mrs. Tollington says languidly, leaning farther back in her carriage, and encouraging her plump ponies onward; "but," surveying Olive over her left shoulder, "you are a good-looking girl, and it must be annoying to find that the men of this age don't appreciate your style of good looks. I have always thought them so foolish to think so much more of blue eyes and light hair; and I have told them so over and over again."

"How you must have been troubled by their admiration!" Olive says, indifferently.

"Troubled!—trouble is no word for it, my dear. Poor papa was so particular, that I really shrank from meeting any new man. I don't know how it is some girls are so run after, and others who are much worthier and better, and who would really make better wives, are left to wear the willow."

Through some peculiar twist in human nature, no girl of twenty-two likes to be called "worthier and better" than the women who have grabbed all the loaves and fishes. Olive is quiet conscious that she is a goose for feeling it, but she does feel very much annoyed with Mrs. Tollington and her pretensions to fascination, as she replies:

"And what a Triton among minnows Captain Tollington must be, for you to have kept yourself

steeped in your enchanted sleep till he appeared!"

The allusion to the sleep that lasts until the real "Happy Prince with joyful eyes," the true "right man," appears, is quite thrown away upon Mrs. Tollington. She does not understand it, and therefore resents it.

"I can tell you I could name six or seven girls who were trying to catch Captain Tollington," she says, a little indignantly, "and I carried him off without trying to do it; not that there is anything contemptibly easy-going about him, as you seem to imply."

"Oh! Mrs. Tollington, no," Olive exclaims, roused into explanation; "I didn't, really I didn't, imply anything of the sort; I only meant that he must have been greater than the others to have won you from them all."

"He had been posted for some years," Mrs. Tollington says, musingly; "and there is something so flattering to us girls in being *trusted* entirely by men who might be our fathers, you know. But *what* I went through mentally before I could decide!"

She pauses here, not because she is in the least shy about stating what her mental doubts were, but because she is not sufficiently imaginative to be able to coin a few on the spot. And Olive, girl as she is, gauges the reason of that pause so thoroughly, and despises the inadequate proportion of it so heartily.

They are in the middle drive of the Hospital grounds by this time, and Mrs. Tollington, by flourishes of her whip, is indicating where So-and-so used to live when she was here "as a child." How is Olive, the recipient of her information, to know that she is making her childhood extend to twenty years? Pough! 'tis but a paltry difficulty, this, and Mrs. Tollington surmounts it with the gallantry of an irresponsible nature.

"How *jealous* the people were of me here, to be sure," she says, with a meditative air, as she drives slowly along through the well-known grounds; "jealous of a child of fifteen, who didn't know whether she was being admired or not! Wasn't it wicked?"

"But how did you know that the women were jealous, when you didn't know that the men gave them cause to be so?" Olive asks, with an air of abstraction that is rather offensive to one who has been laying herself out to tell the whole thing in a narrative form that will sound well. And just as Mrs. Tollington answers, pettishly, "As if one couldn't always tell about the *men*!" Olive sees Philip, one of a group of five men, smoking on the balcony at the end window of the "Trafalgar."

She dare not faint, and she dare not find fault; social decorum forbids her doing either, because she is—powerless. There is nothing left for her to do but to sit back in the carriage, and bear the agony of passing him and not speaking to him. For Mrs. Tollington drives well down under this window, in order that she may have all the credit to be gained by the tact that she can turn her ponies moderately well at the end down by the railings; so Olive even hears his voice.

"What's that you say, Ritchie? 'Phil's last bachelor dinner?' Let us howl! My dear boy, I'll give you a better dinner than this any day at Moorbridge House."

She hears these words. The full meaning of them is borne in upon her mind. She realizes in an instant that the man who has this day written to her, to ask if she "wishes to have done with him altogether," is up there talking to other men about Moorbridge House and his power there. And his power there means power over Madge—the "power of love."

She understands it all, she realizes it all, and she can't help herself. She leans back and turns up her dark, gleaming face to the balcony, where Philip and his friends are sitting, and she cries out, "Oh! take care," for she sees that Mrs. Tollington, in trying to follow her example, and look up too, has involved her reins, and caught the carriage-wheel in the step of a ponderous brake, and they are smashed over in some way or other, and the ordinarily placid ponies are kicking one another.

There is a great commotion and very little even real assistance rendered. Mrs. Tollington's youthful groom has been precipitated from the hind seat, and is weeping over his tattered coat and bruised cheek, and the rowing he will get from the house-

maid (who has to mend his clothes) by-and-by. He is young, much too young, and small, and tightly clad to be useful in any emergency. Naturally, he is incapable at this moment; and so the young men from the balcony rush down to their assistance, and by the time the much-mangled carriage has been pulled from the much-astonished ponies, Philip has recognized Olive, and Olive—has made up her mind what to do.

Be herself! Do herself so much right at last! Show him that she "is no more scorched than he is!" So she resolves. But, ah! how hard the task she has set herself, when she reads the genuine anxiety that is in his eyes, as he recognizes her—flies to her—takes her hand, and mutters:

"Olive, my darling, are you hurt through that fool's mismanagement of her miserable ponies?"

This is the first impression of Mrs. Tollington.

CHAPTER XII.

PHIL!

"Oh! love is such a mystery, I cannot find it out."

It is five days after the photograph episode, and Madge is trying to make herself believe that she has forgotten it, or, at any rate, that she is not worrying herself about it. When she handed it to him, and spoke her speech that night after the Winstaples experiences, she had been full of generous unwillingness to perplex him by the smallest sign of a desire to know anything at all about it.

But now, on reviewing the case calmly, undazzled by the glamor of his presence, she does recall every light and shade that had made the incident a picture to her; and she does feel that she has not been quite fairly treated.

This is how it was. She handed him the likeness, as has been told, saying at the time, "Mrs. Wilmot found this after Olive left, and gave it to me to-day to forward to Olive." She had lifted her eyes to his, and hers were very full of faith, but, at the same time, there was a questioning look in them.

Instead of replying to this questioning look as she had half hoped he would, he had merely given her one of those long effective looks of his, from his deeply, darkly fringed blue eyes—a look that was very beautiful to behold in itself, and regarded as an abstract thing; but that was not entirely satisfactory to a girl who was craving to hear that "it all meant nothing."

She can't bear to do it, but in spite of all her efforts to the contrary she does admit to herself, as she sits alone this day, that "Philip's going off to town in that way was very funny." Even the Hendersons didn't know why he went; and what "made it more awkward," poor Madge felt, was that to her he had said "family business called him," while to Mrs. Henderson he had pleaded the necessity of seeing an old friend who was just on the eve of sailing for India.

She can't either bear to look back or to look forward this morning. Behind her she sees quagmires of direct double-dealing and false pretenses; and though she has passed over these in safety, how about the future? Will it be so again and again; or will the ground be all fair and firm—all in reality what it seems to be?

In her recently engendered doubtful frame of mind, Madge does what is very natural—tries, namely, to keep her anxieties and distrusts to herself, and so shun the observations of others. And it is so hard to do this in the village life where they all know, and like, and seek her; where they are all so familiar with her, that they talk of her marriage perpetually, honestly believing that it must be the pleasantest topic, and that in fealty to Queen Madge they must air it constantly.

Even Mrs. Henderson's fine perceptions desert her, Madge thinks, a little pettishly, as a note from the Vicarage is put into her hand—a note of earnest entreaty that Madge will drive Mrs. Henderson over to luncheon at Parkavon, Griffiths Poynter's place. The excellent young man has a widowed aunt, and a host of cousins staying with him; and these latter are clamorous for amusement. In the innocence and loyalty of his heart, he does believe that the highest form of amusement to be offered to any human being is a sight of Madge Roden.

Philip has been four days away from Halswor-

thy, and to-day she has heard from him for the first time. Intuitively the girl feels, as she reperuses the letter just before driving off for her old friend, that it is not the letter a man would write to his "dear and only love," though he uses the phrase. It is not the letter of the man she has waited for, shutting her heart the while against the advances of all others; it is not the letter of the lover for whose coming she has looked with as sweet and blind a faith as "Little Elsie" had when she sang:

"I will have a lover,
Riding on a steed of steeds;
He shall love me without guile,
And to him I will discover
The swan's nest among the reeds."

Philip says a great deal about the many slopes and dear shady glades of Moorbridge Park; a great deal about the happiness he has tasted there, and the charm of the girl who has made that happiness; a great deal about the Hendersons' magnanimous kindness, and the generous view his aunt and cousins have taken of what he is pleased to call his "freak;" but absolutely nothing at all about what he is doing in town, or what detains him there.

"Have I been a precipitate fool?" the girl can't help asking herself, "or do men always let you go thus far and no farther into their real lives? It's rather unfair. He knows all about, and I know."

She dislikes finishing the sentence. After all, there is something humiliating in making full confession of knowing nothing at all of one's future husband. So she hums the first few bars of her favorite waltz by way of finale to her sentence, and tries to wonder "what Griffiths has got going on at Parkavon."

It's a long drive to Parkavon, and a long portion of the drive is through the "Poynter property." The talk between the two ladies is of Griffiths and his belongings (naturally of them) for a while. They conjecture as to the cousins and aunts. They speculate as to whether these latter will "try to marry Grif." They surmise that, whatever they are, "they're safe not to be half good enough for the dear old fellow." "In fact," Madge puts in with an uneasy laugh, "no one is but me. I ought to have married Grif myself." And then silence falls on them, and they ruminate.

How Madge dreads the breaking of that silence. How she flicks her ponies with unwonted force, hoping to make them fly over the ground that intervenes between themselves and Parkavon before Mrs. Henderson can say anything. How she almost gasps as Mrs. Henderson shakes silence off, and says with an effort:

"How is Philip, dear Madge?"

"Quite well, I suppose," Madge says, becoming absorbed in the contemplation of the off trace at once. "I hate driving these cobs on the check; I shall take them on the middle-bar coming home; grooms are as stupid as—other men."

Mrs. Henderson knows that there is a sore, and fears greatly to press on it. But there may be as much pain in silence as in speech. If Madge thinks that the subject of Philip is evaded, she will be justified in being hurt and annoyed. Mrs. Henderson collects the shattered remnants of her faith in the affair being a promising one, and says:

"Though he was a stranger to it three months ago, Halsworthy isn't Halsworthy without Philip. I shall be so glad when he's back—in his proper place."

Silence on the part of Madge. Presently Mrs. Henderson is sorry to find she is not surprised to see that Madge is crying.

"My darling," she says, tenderly, "supposing he were in either service, and ordered away for three or four years; compare your position with that of hundreds of girls who love and marry officers."

"If he'd been ordered away and compelled to stay, I should be happy enough," Madge says; "but I think he liked to go, and I feel he likes to stay. There, I've said it."

Palpably the subject had better be dropped. Therefore Mrs. Henderson drops it, and Madge feels sorely that Mrs. Henderson is as doubtful as herself of the wisdom of all the work of the last few weeks. Accordingly, they ruminate again for a mile, and then Mrs. Henderson makes an-

other effort in what she firmly believes to be a perfectly safe direction.

"Have you heard how Olive is getting on, dear?"

"No; I wrote to her telling her of my engagement to Philip, but whether it's 'out of sight, out of mind,' with her, or whether she has never had my letter, I can't tell; I only know that she has never answered it."

"Perhaps Mrs. Tollington's demands on Olive's time leave the poor child too worn out for letter-writing, or perhaps"—

"Oh, please don't," Madge interrupts; "it doesn't matter. I should never exact love and attention from anyone who didn't render both willingly."

"What would you do, Madge?"

"Give up," Madge says, firmly; "one can always do that, you know. Here we are; and, oh, dear! I am too tired to care to speak to anyone."

Parkavon's "portals open wide" to receive her. In other words, a footman opens the front door, and Griffiths runs from the drawing-room into the hall to greet her.

"Where's Fletcher?" he begins, with effusion, to cover the bubbling up of the bliss he feels in holding Madge's hand, and looking into Madge's face, in his own house. "I asked you to get him to come, Mrs. Henderson."

"He's in London," Madge says, briefly. "Come, Grif, take the goods the gods give you, and be thankful, and don't hanker after the absent—I don't."

"Does she mean it?" both Grif and Mrs. Henderson ask themselves, as she goes on with her fair face red as a rose. And it really seems that she does, as she turns to them, all color and animation, and says:

"I like meeting strangers; where are your aunt and cousins, Grif?"

"In here," he says; and they go into a drawing-room, where seven ladies sit on seven chairs, working at seven pieces of lace-work.

"My aunt, Mrs. Wainwright; my cousins, the Miss Wainwrights," he says, comprehensively. "Mrs. Henderson, Miss Roden," and as he names Madge, such a gleam of pride in her, and longing for them all to admit that his pride in her is justifiable, irradiates his face, that Madge can't help contrasting the love that has never been told in words, with the other of which Philip is the exponent.

The Wainwrights are not essential to my story. They cannot claim the honor of separate portraiture. A family group, hastily dashed in, is all that is necessary.

The mother is weak, widowed, wearifully anxious to see her daughters well married—or married at all. The daughters are big, buxom, all wearing chignons of exactly the same shape and size, all speaking in exactly the same slightly-strained and very artificial tones, all looking about the same age, and all hoping for the same end.

From the day the eldest reached the age of twenty, (and the youngest is twenty now), Griffiths, their cousin, has been regarded by them as their legitimate and proper prey. They had each in succession grown up at him, and each failed to gain him. And each has felt inclined to resent the efforts of the one who has gone before as a piece of personal injustice toward the current fair foe to Griffith's peace of heart. But the clannish feeling obtains with them greatly; and they are always ready to unite their forces and declare war upon any outsider upon whom Grif turns a commendatory eye.

Madge Roden has been cited to them, quoted to them, extolled to them by unguarded Grif, until they have come to the pass of putting wrong lace stitches in at the bare mention of her name. At the sight of her, is it any marvel that they prick their fingers?

The seven chairs upon which they sit become seven seats of judgment the instant she enters, and they all find her guilty of "designs" on Griffiths. For Madge, who brims over with cordiality and kindness, is being gracious to the full extent of her graciousness, is shaking hands with them all, and admiring the view, and saying how "nice the dear old room looks with a lot of ladies in it," in a way that the Miss Wainwrights denounce in the secret recesses of their souls as "simply audacious."

And all the while Madge's thoughts are wandering. Is it right—is it just to her sex that she, so petted and sought and made much of by other people who are nothing to her, should allow herself to be treated as a nonentity by the one who is everything to her? She is longing, longing to ask Grif if all men are alike in this. But she remembers just in time that Philip does not like Grif, and so she forbears.

They have luncheon presently, and all the Miss Wainwrights giggle in subdued mirth in chorus, as something is said about the head of the table. When their mother is inducted into it, she regards each one of them deprecatingly, as if she would say, "I am ready to resign it to you, beloved child, at the lightest hint from him." But he does not offer the lightest hint, and they all sit down as guests, with Madge somehow as the honored one.

And how they hate her for this honoring to which they do not subscribe, and to which she does not aspire! They think she "means" so many things of which she is entirely guiltless. For example, they rather think that she thinks "their presence here at Parkavon may effect the influence she is trying to establish over Grif," on whom they look as one fated to be theirs eventually. And all the while they are thinking these things, and half hinting these things by their manner, poor Madge is striving not to be self-absorbed in her miserable half-doubts, half-fears about Philip—about her love for him and his for her.

It is a relief to her when luncheon is over, for she can't eat, and she knows that her want of appetite is being noticed, and sensitively dreads it being ascribed to the right cause. And shrinking from this, she confirms all the Miss Wainwrights' convictions that she is "a designing puss," by saying "yes" heartily when Griffiths asks her to go in the grounds with him, and look at a new garden he has just had made at some distance from the house.

The Parkavon grounds lend themselves to picturesque gardening very well, for a river full of cascades runs through, and their undulations would be called hill and dale in another part of the country. This new garden is in the old romantic English style that obtained before Dutch stiffness and Italian artificiality set it. Through such a garden the gallant queen, who is always being picked to pieces in this age, because of her capacious heart, may have walked with Leicester, and Sussex, and Hunsdon, and Raleigh amidst the odors of roses, jasmines, and gillyflowers, and sweet marjoram. Shaded by huge shrubs and trees, cooled by running water, rendered fragrant by the old familiar flowers that each of them had known from their childhood, it is no wonder that a sort of restfulness settles down on both Madge and Griffiths as they step into the bounds of the enchanted spot.

"I'm so glad you didn't bring a band of your cousins with us, Grif," Madge says, in a languid tone; "they will talk so much—in sentences—that it's hard work to listen to them, and harder work to answer; it's so *sweet* to sit and say nothing sometimes."

"You were never one of the very silent ones till"—

"Till?" she questions firmly, steadily fixing her eyes on his, and braving herself to hear the truth at last.

"Well—till your engagement," he says, hesitatingly, blushing a good deal as he says it, for Madge is still the dearest thing on earth to him.

She shakes her head involuntarily.

"I suppose it's so with all girls, Grif," she says, pleadingly; "it is, isn't it? It's such a change; and one's past life seems to be all nothing, and the future seems so very important and uncertain; and it is so with all girls, isn't it, Grif?"

There is an exquisite air of anxious appeal in her eyes, in her voice, in her manner. But Grif is nothing if he is not candid, so now he says:

"Not with girls who are happily engaged, I think, dear."

And Madge turns and leans on some railings that are marking out the new garden still, and her eyes look out steadily on the gleaming, blooming flowers and the bright foliage, and see nothing; and she cannot contradict him, or even argue with him.

As she stands thus, a bold, free footstep falls upon their ears; and presently, as Grif is say-

ing, "People often stray in here from that wood, through which there is a public right of way," there comes through the bowery hedge of shrubs the figure of a man—a stalwart, lithe, supple-jointed man, who walks out freely, and looks about him with interest. He is dressed in rather common tourist garb—gray clothes and a white felt hat, and he carries a knapsack on his shoulders. He strides out well from the hips, and his tones are those of a gentleman decidedly, as he stops in surprise, doffs his hat to Madge, and says:

"I fear I'm a trespasser. I've lost my way in getting out of that wood; will you be kind enough to tell me a short cut to the highroad?"

There is the shadow of a something they have seen before, both Griffiths and Madge feel, as they look at this man and listen to him. And he, meanwhile, is looking at Madge under his level, lowered lids, and thinking, "Here's the realization of my ideal of an English girl. Lucky dog! that fellow by her side."

Griffiths Poynter has never in the whole course of his life done a chilly act, or uttered a repressing word. He feels, somehow or other now, that it behooves him to make amends for that seductiveness in his grounds which has lured this wayfarer out of the right path. So he says:

"Come on to the house, and have refreshment at least. I can promise you dinner and a welcome. My name's Poynter."

"And I," the other says, "am Philip Fletcher."

CHAPTER XIII.

A BREAKDOWN.

"Falsar than all fancy fathoms, falsar than all songs have sung."

Mrs. TOLLINGTON's little carriage has been mended, and Mrs. Tollington's little ponies' nerves have been restored to their pristine strength, and Mrs. Tollington's mortification at having caused an awkward upset just when she desired to shine as a female Jehu has evaporated; and still her "rescuer," as she persists in calling Mr. Philip Fletcher, calls daily to make inquiries about her at the house on breezy Blackheath.

His attentions are very pleasing to the fair lady who rules in this house. He is handsome, and he has the gay art in perfection of adapting the style of his converse to his hearers. With Mrs. Tollington he is disgusted to find himself drifting into a feebly vivacious, sentimental strain, whenever Olive is out of the room. And Olive, in spite of the momentary weakness—the glorious weakness that will obtain while love and the world lasts—which made her say, "Oh! Phil," with much loving effusion, when Philip picked her up from under the ponies' feet, and called her his "darling"—Olive rarely stays in the room with him.

As the magnet draws the needle, so Philip, in spite of his troth-plight to absent, unsuspecting Madge, is drawn by that house on Blackheath. Daily he tells himself that "it isn't his will or his wish that takes him there; it is fate!—and a precious wayward fate too." Courtesy compelled him to call at first, and inquire for the gushing, grateful wife of the man who was soon coming home to be made an admiral. And though she scarcely spoke or looked at him on the occasion of that courtesy-call, still his false feet and his false hopes carry him there daily. At Mr. Tollington's earnest request, be it understood; for Mrs. Tollington has evoked a theory in her own manœuvring mind. She has sharp sight, though her glance is but a languid one, and she has taken less note of Olive's quick change of color, of the quivering of Olive's eyelids, and the passionate droop of Olive's eyes, whenever Philip Fletcher appears. "She loves him, and has tried and failed to catch him," the experienced matron thinks. "It will do her good—teach her a lesson—to get him to show her that he takes more pleasure in my society than in hers; though I am a married woman, who never, of course, can be anything but a friend to me."

In her heart Mrs. Tollington calls Olive "a sly, artful, specious impostor" for having said what she did say about Philip the day the photograph came. "He has evidently had to repulse her," Mrs. Tollington thinks; and she moralizes over the "forwardness of some girls," and thanks Heaven she is not as they are."

In pursuance of her plan of teaching Olive a lesson, she gives Philip Fletcher a pressing general invitation to her house. "I will not lose sight of my preserver," she murmurs, meaningly. "Captain Tollington must know and thank you when he comes home." She tells the story of the courage and self-devotion he displayed "risking his life to save hers," when the two small ponies were tumbling about in their traces—tells it to all the social winds that blow about Blackheath, and they waft it everywhere. She claims him as her special providence-provided friend, and gets him to walk in the lime-tree avenue with her, when she hopes that all the stalking sisterhoods she meets are heart-sore with envy at not being escorted in a like manner.

And Philip—selfish Philip—suffers the claim of friendship to be made, and seems to agree to it, and walks with her, and talks to her, and flatters her folly, and all for the sake of getting a look from Olive that is never given—a word from Olive that is never said. He loathes Mrs. Tollington's gratitude. He hates her assumption of friendship and intimacy with himself. He scornfully laughs at her evident belief in his interest in her. But he goes on flattering her folly, because she brings him near to Olive—brings him near to the girl he has renounced, whom he loves better than he will ever love anything on this earth.

And for what end is it that he does this after all? He knows that he has forfeited all right to long for that love. He knows that Olive will never let him touch the tips of her fingers again with tenderness. He knows that all this dalliance is the idlest waste of time—that nothing can come of it, save greater unhappiness to himself—and yet he goes on hovering about her, seeking to win some slight return from her with an intensity that startles himself almost.

He has his periods of remorse too; the worst of us have them. His conduct to these girls is the "conduct of a blackguard," he knows, and he does not scruple to tell himself so. There is not a moment in the day when he would not, if he could, cast himself at Olive's feet, or clasp her to his heart, and cover her face with kisses. And yet he means to marry Madge! And the two girls know each other, and are friends; and he has sought them both so warmly! And well—he is "a scoundrel," he knows. But still he goes yet again to Mrs. Tollington's house.

He arrives there one day, just after Mrs. Tollington has gone out for a drive with a friend, leaving Olive Aveland alone. It is a late autumn or rather early winter day, and Olive, in her restlessness, can't endure sitting in a bleak, fireless room. Mrs. Tollington's arrangements are all sumptuous as regards herself, but rather screwy as regards other people. It is her custom to spend a goodly portion of each day in her dressing-room, watching her maid altering and re-contriving her garments of price. Accordingly the fire is there, and the drawing-room is kept clean and chilly until the evening.

The companionship of the maid is no more agreeable to Olive than is the chill atmosphere of the drawing-room; accordingly she goes out into rather pretty gardens, and walks about among the battered geraniums and mignonette, and the stiff, sturdy dahlias and chrysanthemums, recalling there, as she did everywhere else, the shattered romance of her life.

If she could only crush her love for this man, who had shown himself worse than "unworthy," who had shown himself "regardless" of her, out of her heart! If she could only have a satisfactory answer to her prayer, that she "might be fickle," granted her! If she could only see some other man, whose eyes and hair, and tones and turns of thought, and walk and words, would haunt her!

Was it always to be going on like this, that she couldn't forget him, and ached horribly at the memory of him, or would he in time tire of others, and come back to her? Her heart bounded with joy at the possibility which she had conjured up. Some girls tell us they "have too much pride ever to think of a man who has slighted them." They may be telling the truth, but I know that Olive Aveland's love was not after this sort. If he had slighted her ninety-nine times, and caressed her the hundredth, she would have forgotten the

slights, and enjoyed the caress as only a woman can.

In the agony of her mind, as she wanders about the damp garden-paths, she asks herself, What she can have done that she should be singled out to endure such pangs, such gnawings, as these? What can she have done? Why should other women, her inferiors in head and heart and beauty, be married to the men they loved, while she was left forlorn in this way? And what was there about Philip Fletcher to make him the one man on earth to her?

"I wish I could hate him," she mutters. "I wish I could laugh at him; how will he look when he gets old? Just like other men, with no teeth, and bald spots on their heads, and punchy figures. Oh! but I'll be old too, then, Philip; and all my youth will be passed without you!"

She walks fast, fast, faster, round the garden, and aches to have him beside her. "Though it would be no good if he were here—it would all end in nothing," she says, in a paroxysm of loving sulkiness. And just as she says it, he comes right into her path; for he has caught sight of her from the exalted door-step; and at sight of him, the girl goes into a paradise where fever rages at once.

They try to be conversational, and he tells her that he has come to call on Mrs. Tollington, and that, finding Mrs. Tollington out, he had ventured to walk round the garden, and "Won't you say you're glad to see me, Olive?" he pleads humbly, in such a low voice.

"Glad to see him!" how can she tell what she is, when she's trembling so that she can't make her breath come right, and can't regulate her steps? She takes two or three short, quick ones, and then goes falteringly and slowly; and she knows all the while that he is looking at her with that concentrated gaze which she once so loved to meet.

She calls herself a "fool," an "easily won fool," and she can't succeed, the poor enraptured child, in feeling anything like coldness or aversion to the cause of her folly. All she can feel is, "He has come! he has come to me."

Everything protrudes itself distinctly, and makes her abstractedly conscious of it; the damp, yellow gravel-path, that looks rather like bruised sponge-cake, glares at her, and the limp, hanging trusses of geranium, that were a vivid scarlet before the last rain, lop forward over the border and clamor for her pity; and she can only walk on, just as straight as she may, between all this vegetable matter that seems to be sympathetically out of joint, and wish, oh! so heartily, that she could dare to snuggle her head down on the shoulder of the man at her side, and there whisper out all her love and doubt and agitation.

Is not this an ignominious and ill-regulated state of feeling? "The creature!" to suffer love to reign in her heart for a man who was not ready with the offer and the ring! How horribly human and detestably womanly! Surely all Mrs. Grundy's daughters will be advised to shun her, and to take no further interest in her fortunes. To go on loving when it is no longer expedient to do so! What a pity this poor Olive lacks the convenient powers of unloving and forgetting directly—it would be advantageous for her to do it!

"Won't you say you're glad to see me?" he repeats, and the truth is pressed out of Olive by the repetition.

"You know that I am better than I can tell you. I don't think it's gladness that I feel, but madness!"

She says this last sentence in a whisper almost; and he realizes that, in the midst of her passionate pleasure in seeing him, there is a deep vein of hopelessness. Poor Olive! "Does she know how utterly hopeless it all is?" he wonders; does she know about Madge?"

As he is thinking this, Olive probes the dart of the affair that gives her the most poignant pain.

"When are you going back to Moorbridge House, Mr. Fletcher?"

"Don't call me that!" he cries, hastily. "I can bear a great deal; but 'Mr. Fletcher' from you, Olive, you won't!"

"When are you going back?" she interrupts, tottering almost on her feet as well as in her judgment.

"Why do you ask?"

"I heard what you said just before we were upset, the other day," she says rapidly, lifting her eyes to his face, and meeting the look that she knows has been in his eyes all along. "I heard what you said, and I suppose I know what it meant."

"It meant young men's chaff, Olive," he says falteringly, for he is ashamed of himself for prevaricating so meanly. "You're often hearing from Halsworthy, aren't you? Mrs. Henderson and Miss Roden have the name of being capital correspondents."

"I have one letter—only one—from Miss Roden," she tells him; and then she flushes fiercely and adds, "and that I tore up without reading, because—"

"Because of what?"

"Because I thought it might hold news that would hurt me!" she says, impetuously; and then he stifles the cries of his conscience, and resolves that she shall not hear of his engagement yet. She had tried to evade it—had confessed that she had tried to evade it; and wherefore, then, should he thrust it upon her? The blow must fall in time, but just a little longer it might be averted.

The agitation of her spirit is fretting and fatiguing her physically. She feels literally that every step taken exhausts her energies, and leaves her mentally and morally more at his mercy; and she knows that he has none.

"I have been walking for a long time, and I am tired, I must go in."

"Do you mean this as a signal for my departure? After all, is five minutes' conversation with me all the grace you have for me now? How lightly you women can let most things go!"

"Don't speak bitterly to me, Philip," she says, trembling a little at the pathos he can put into his tones at an instant's notice, and a little, also, with indignation at the calm audacity which enables him to cast the burden of his conduct upon her.

"Don't send me away, Olive. Sit down on this bench, and let me tell you something. Yes, you must hear it, though perhaps you won't be interested, and will think me a fool for my pains. I came down to the 'Trafalgar' that day solely with the hope of seeing you. I felt as if I couldn't live without a sight of you, and I should have walked about Blackheath till it was granted me. Olive, why did you leave that photograph behind at Mrs. Wilmot's?"

"It was left by accident; and how did you know it was left at all?"

"It was given to me, and I forwarded it. That wretched woman flaunted it all over the marketplace at Winstaple one day. Don't you value it any more, Olive, that you leave it behind you carelessly, to be commented on by every idle tongue and vulgar mind?"

"Not value it? It's all that's left to me," she says, sorrowfully. Then she hates herself for what she calls the cowardice that causes her to linger by him just so long as he pleases.

The subject of Madge Roden has a painfully strong fascination for her. Surely, if Philip were engaged to Madge, he would tell her. That dreadful consummation has not been achieved yet. Still, though she tells herself this, she flutters back to the subject.

"When did you leave Halsworthy?"

"A fortnight ago."

"And how was Mrs. Henderson? Were they all quite well?"

"Quite well, thank you. Never mind Halsworthy now; tell me about yourself. Does that fool of woman behave decently to you. Are you happy here, Olive?"

"Happy!" how can he ask her that? Why she couldn't be happy in a palace of which she was the queen, if he were not with her; and he knows it—he must know it. She manages to say:

"Yes, she is kind enough. When do you go back?"

"Where to?"

"Why, to Halsworthy, of course; we were talking of Halsworthy."

"Talk of something pleasanter, Olive," he says, eagerly; and now he can't resist putting his hand on one of hers, which is resting on the back of the bench. With what wild joy that hand was once yielded up to him! remembering this, how can he dare to touch it now?

"How wrong all this is!" she cries, starting up. "How weak and wicked I am!"

"You weak and wicked, poor child?"

"Yes, to let you make me such a slave. Just think, if you had a sister, and any man tortured her as you do me!"

"I blame myself every hour of my life, Olive," he says, humbly; "you can't say harder things of me than I think of myself."

This self-depreciation of his brings her down again.

"Oh, Philip! don't think I mean hard things; but I get bewildered, and feel then that I must be awfully weak, or you wouldn't treat me so."

"Let us be friends, if we can't be more," he says, speciously. "To lose you altogether out of my life is a little more than I can bear, and I've borne hard things in my time, dear. Let us be friends; let me see you sometimes, and feel that you will turn to me as you would to a brother."

A great dry sob rises up and chokes her; the tortures of Tantalus can have been nothing to this.

This is asking for bread, and being given a stone, with a vengeance.

"And when you marry, what will your wife think of our friendship—for you will marry, Philip?"

"If I said to you, 'You will marry and forget me, Olive, and be false to the claims of friendship I make upon you,' would you not feel that I was unjust and cruel?" he asks, in a hurt tone.

"Yes, because I am I; but you are you." Then she collects all her strength; she interlaces her fingers, and presses them together to keep down any show of pain, and says:

"Is it Madge?"

He is not prepared for the question; he had really thought that he had cleverly drawn a boundary-line round the subject of himself and Olive, and that the latter would not overstep it. In his surprise, he tells the truth.

"Yes, it is."

"You are engaged to her?"

"I am, Olive, my love!"

CHAPTER XIV.

"HAVE I DONE WELL, OR ILL?"

MADGE RODEN is as self-possessed as it is desirable that any girl of twenty should be. She has played the part of young lady of the land, Queen of Halsworthy, and idol of the neighborhood, too long for any feeble embarrassing doubts as to her relative importance to come forward and cripple her on ordinary occasions. But this does not seem to her an ordinary occasion—this first rather romantic meeting with the real Simon Pure.

Here before her is the man about whom she has heard from her childhood as a hero, the man for whom she had almost unconsciously designed herself, and for whom she is very sure Mrs. Henderson had designed her; and he is the cousin of her future husband, and she ought to give him a welcome, and let him understand their future relationship at once.

"But perhaps I ought to leave it to Grif," she thinks. "Grif may imagine that I fancy he doesn't understand etiquette, if I put myself forward before he has thought it necessary to introduce this waif and stray to me." So she marches on with her pretty, easy step by Grif's side, and Philip Fletcher is left in ignorance of her name, for Grif forgets his part of master of these ceremonies.

"I'm going on to a place called Halsworthy," Philip explains, as he swings out with as free and light a step as if he hadn't already walked twenty-five miles this day; "going to look up an old friend of my mother's; do you know her—Mrs. Henderson?"

"She's in my house at the present moment," Griffiths exclaims, delightedly. And then Philip, or Phil, as he is invariably called, leans forward and says:

"Then I am sure this is Miss Roden," and crosses over and takes the girl's hand and adds:

"Philip and I are like brothers; you must forgive me for telling you abruptly how glad I shall be to have you for a sister."

She takes in all the points of resemblance and all the points of difference between her Philip and this one at a glance. They have the same level brows—the same steady glance, the same easy,

careless way. But her Philip is indisputably the handsomer of the two—handsomer—and half an inch taller.

They each hear a great deal and tell a great deal to one another as they walk back from the old English garden to the house. Phil, for instance, hears that Halsworthy is so many miles from Parkavon, and is told that, being so many, he had better make up his mind to be driven on by Miss Roden, rather than walk there. And Madge hears several little incidents of his pedestrian tour down into this country briskly narrated, for Phil has the great merit of being lucid and brief—his narrations last about a minute and a half. His hearers are not compelled to distort their facial muscles in order to portray a feeling of interest which is quite dead. He is terse, picturesque, graphic. In short, he is amusing, without attempting to be facetious. And Madge finds him amusing, and Madge likes him for being so; and Madge in all her life never concealed a liking. "Oh! the pity of it that he didn't come before!" Mrs. Henderson's prophetic heart almost palpitates the words as he goes in, and makes himself known to her, and she feels that there is about him all the radiance of reality.

So like, and so unlike! At every turn they are reminded by him of that cousin of his who has wooed and won, and gone away so easily and carelessly and deceitfully. They can't help it. Mrs. Henderson and Madge catch themselves looking at one another, and interrogating one another mutely, as some of the absent Philip's very tones fall on their ears with a truer ring than "his can ever have," they feel in silence and in sorrow.

The young pedestrian tourist is too tired to care to engage in the croquet match which Griffiths presently organizes; and so he is left with Mrs. Henderson, while the seven girls and Grif play that game, which is the strong point and sole remaining hope of the Misses Wainwright.

For they play it well—very well indeed; driving interloping balls away into space, and helping those who can reward them for their help with the most consummate ease and skill. But, for all their ease and skill and amiability (displayed toward himself alone), Grif can't help wishing that they would let him get a word with Madge sometimes outside the reach of their keen ears.

To tell the truth, Madge is not very keen about croquet this day. She would far rather hear what this stranger, who is still no stranger, is saying to Mrs. Henderson. Finally inclination gets the better of her, and she begs a left-out Miss Wainwright to take her mallet and place, and asks Grif to order her pony carriage.

"You're going away very early," Griffiths says, discontentedly; and somehow he associates this new-comer with Madge's impatience to be gone, and hates the name of "Philip Fletcher" even more than he hated it when the other man who bore it was present. But, in spite of his discontent, he contrives to free himself presently from the trammels of croquet, and comes and stands close by Madge, to the trembling wrath of the Miss Wainwrights.

Madge is in such a thoughtful mood that she looks almost sad. She has been following many sudden springs of thought that have gushed up in her mind this day to their sources, and the result of her investigation is a stinging distrust of novelty and appearance.

"Grif," she begins gravely, not looking at the man she is addressing, but letting her eyes fasten themselves on a distant object that does not call for any attention from her—"Grif, you have known your cousins a long time, haven't you?"

"All their lives, I think," he answers, indifferently. He has no manner of feeling for or interest in his cousins, beyond the one of their being his blood-relations. He has no special liking, no faint admiration, for any one of them. On the contrary, now that he sees them near Madge, he marks all their inelegancies of feature, and figure, and manner with a perspicuity that would send the Miss Wainwrights' hearts down to dismal depths did they but know it. Happily for their current peace of mind, they don't know it. So they posture, and pose, and propel their balls about with a pleasant feeling of playing well, and impressing Grif with the fact.

"You will marry one of them by-and-by," Madge

says, prophetically; and now she transfixes Grif with a glance, "and you will be so right, Grif."

"Marry one of them?—good Lord! no—not even if I had never known—I mean, if I had never seen anyone else," Grif replies, hurriedly.

"My dear Grif, what nonsense!" Madge says tolerantly, with that immense air of superior knowledge and experience which is one of Madge's special attributes. "You think you won't now, I quite believe that; but I know how these things end generally, and I say you'll marry one of your cousins by-and-by, and you'll be so right."

In spite of his being some years older than Madge, in spite of his firm belief in her engagement with Philip Fletcher being her solitary love-affair, Grif has an unaccountable feeling of youth and inexperience steal over him as he listens to this girl. But he casts one look at the group on the croquet-ground, and that look strengthens him in the position he had taken at first.

"They're good sort of girls enough," he says; "but when it comes to marrying them, that's a different thing."

"Of course not 'them,' but *one* of them, Grif; you'll single out one in time, and then she'll seem so different to her sisters that you will wonder you hadn't seen her superiority to the rest all along; and then all your long knowledge of her will make you love more, and you'll feel so happy and so safe."

He knows now, the sympathetic, generous, tender fellow, that she is contrasting her positive case with his possible one. She has no long knowledge of her lover to fall back upon and make her love him more, now that he is away, trying her by his unnecessary absence.

"Well," he says, trying to think away the tears that will come into his eyes at the thought of Madge's distress, "we needn't talk about my marriage yet—not for many a long day. I'd rather not talk about it at all to you now," he can't help adding in a mutter.

"I don't suppose people are ever quite happy, whether they get what they want, or whether they lose it," Madge answers, following her spring of thought well home to its source, in firm reliance on Grif not taking the smallest advantage of her daring spirit of exploration. And Grif justifies her reliance, for he only shakes his head and says:

"Perhaps you're right; all the same, I'm sorry I lost what I wanted."

Madge is not a coquette by design, she has no greed for miscellaneous love and admiration, but she does like to keep alive what she feels to be the firm, true, and good interest which Grif has in her, and she in him. And so when she is saying good-bye to him this day, she uses the very words that a practiced coquette would use.

"As soon as you've settled on the one, Grif, let me know, that I may indorse your choice if I can. I shall be frightfully jealous and exacting for you."

He can't answer her in the half-real, half-bantering tone she has taken up. He can only gulp down a big ball of hopelessly passionate emotion. Why will she?—how can she like him so much and not love him a little? So he says nothing aloud, calls her his "darling" in his heart, and as Madge drives away with her friends, he goes back to his cousins.

In spite of himself, Madge's words make him regard them in a new light. In spite of himself, he scans them all curiously in search of the possibility of one being a trifle superior to the others. And all hopes of finding that which he is searching for flee from him, as they chorus out some of their convictions respecting Madge.

"I wonder, with all that money, that Miss Roden hasn't married before, Grif."

"Why, she's young enough in all conscience," he says testily.

"Is she—young? dear me! young for an heiress, I suppose you mean. Seven or eight and twenty? well, of course that's not old."

"Seven or eight and twenty!—she's not twenty-one yet; she's only waiting till she's of age to marry."

"Poor thing! how terrible for her to have gone off so then, if she is so young as that."

"Gone off! why she gets prettier and prettier every day," Grif says, indignantly.

"Oh! Grif, really we shall think, I don't know what—all sorts of things, if you pretend to see beauty in Miss Roden. No, no," (with a great air of magnanimity), "she's a nice amiable girl, unaffected and simple, and evidently desirous of pleasing; but pretty! no, no!"

"Fine feathers make fine birds," another Miss Wainwright remarks, with a vicious recollection of how becoming Madge's dress had been to her.

"No one can deny that her feathers were fine enough," a third strikes in; "rather over-dressed, wasn't she, mamma? Costly things on a girl like that can't be called good taste even by her most infatuated friends."

"It was amusing to see how eager she was to relinquish you, Grif, and to get hold of Mr. Fletcher," another Miss Wainwright cries, laughing a great deal too long and loud for the laughter to be genuine. "She was all eyes and ears for you at luncheon; and you see when he came she couldn't play croquet like the rest of us, but must go and stand near him and try to attract his attention. I suppose she thinks she may be as bold as she pleases. She can afford to make herself conspicuous."

"She never tried to attract any man's attention in her life," Grif says, hotly; "she has enough of it without trying."

"Now, Grif, don't be angry, but just wait and see if I am not right. While her lover is away, she will get up a flirtation with his cousin; she was pretending to take such interest in everything he said, it was sickening."

And it is one of these women who say such things of her that Madge prophesies he will marry by-and-by.

During the drive home Madge is restlessly vicious. She describes the Miss Wainwrights to Phil; she mimics them; she laughs at them; she pulls herself up suddenly in frowning impatience at the thought of the very event she has suggested as possible to Griffiths. And Mrs. Henderson, watching her with loving, anxious eyes, feels that the mirth and the mimicry are both false, and that Madge, her darling, is in the agony of a perplexity with which no outsider may dare to meddle.

Their conversation is cramped, after all, directly she leaves off her mockery of the Miss Wainwrights. In the common order of things, Philip, the absent, ought to be, and would be, the topic. But it is treading on treacherous ground to speak of him to the man he personated while it served his purpose. Both Madge and Mrs. Henderson have a strong feeling upon them, now that they see him, of having defrauded this late-comer.

Moreover, Madge is rapidly becoming too angry with Philip for having gone in the way he has, and staid in the way he has, to speak of him without a certain tremulous tone of voice that she is very much ashamed of. And in the midst of her refraining from all mention of him, she feels that it is due to herself not to shrink from the topic—due to Mrs. Henderson to let his cousin know as soon as possible that there has been no connivance on her dear old friend's part—due to Philip, her lover, to mention him without fear, and to show that she dreads no reproach concerning him.

And she cannot do it.

Failing heart, and failing faith! How she tries to prop up both; how she tries to flatter herself back into blind belief; how she shrinks from a gleam of further light; how she regrets that the one who was meant to be the "real" Prince from the first has come, and that he is so little disappointing. How she blames herself for all these feelings.

There is intense relief to her in getting home this day—intense relief in getting back to the old home where no harm has ever befallen her, and where she has never been more nor less than she is now, to all the loyal, faithful hearts who dwell there. A sense of relief and safety creeps over her as she flings the reins down and jumps out, and then remembers that she is mistress here, and says, quite freely and cordially:

"You must come and dine with us to-day, that you and my aunt may know each other, without

delay, Mr. Fletcher. There is nothing out of the way in my asking him the first day I see him, is there?" she appeals to Mrs. Henderson; "for we are to be cousins, you know."

She feels that this is a superfluous reminder, as soon as she has uttered it; and so she tries to look and act as if she didn't, and is un-Madge-like altogether. Explanations, elaborations, all are foreign to Madge's nature.

"Why on earth should she try to speak of this subject before him?" Mrs. Henderson thinks, as they go to the room where Miss Roden senior awaits them.

Madge has got herself together in her progress from the hall door to the oak-wainscotted room, that still retained its ancient designation of "parlor" at Moorbridge. She is quite the Madge her friends all love to see her, as she goes gracefully and gayly forward to her old relative, saying, as she goes:

"Philip's cousin is here, aunt—another Philip Fletcher; you must welcome him, for Philip's sake and mine, until you know him better."

"Another Philip Fletcher is rather discomposing to Miss Roden, but she makes the best of the social jungle into which they have all rambled, and proceeds at once to talk polite conversation with immense old-lady power.

"You are just fresh from London, and the country must look very beautiful to you," she says, as if the country were all her own doing, and she did like to hear a word, in acknowledgment of its superiority to everything else on earth, uttered at times.

"Yes, very beautiful," he says, looking at Madge, and thinking of Madge, and utterly failing to grasp the entire meaning of old Miss Roden's words, "very beautiful, but"—

"But not for me," is what would be the conclusion of his sentence, if old Miss Roden, in her ardent desire to confute what she considers a compromising mention of the natural beauties of Habsworthy, didn't interrupt him.

"But—now you're not going to tell me that you think it too cramped and low? I won't hear it. See the expanse—the bold sweep above it?"

For a wild moment, Philip Fletcher thinks that Miss Roden is speaking of Madge's brow, and Madge's glorious arching head. Then he collects his faculties, knows that he is misunderstanding her, and making an idiot of himself, and answers:

"Do believe me, I think all I see perfection. I never dreamed of such an earthly paradise as this in which I find myself."

"And you will find yourself in it very often, I hope, by-and-by, when your cousin is master here," Madge says, gallantly, though the corners of her mouth twitch painfully as she speaks. And then she leaves him, with that last speech of hers ringing in his ears, while she goes to dress for dinner.

Madge Roden is no coquette. She does not desire to deck her beauty in this stranger's eyes, for the sake of making them smart with an admiration which they should not express. Nevertheless, the taste of the woman will have it so. She puts on a white dress, and then tries ribbons of various colors against her cheeks and hair, to see which suits her best. And at last she doffs the white dress, and dons a cream-tinted one, with which some sweet wild-rose pink harmonizes admirably.

And she puts her rich hair in cloudy ripples over her brow, and commands the sweet, tremulous lines of her mouth to "be still," and tries hard to regulate the sparkling measure of her eyes. And when she has done all these things, she goes down, knowing that she is looking her best, and that her best is a very fair thing.

So they all dine together (for Mr. Henderson has been summoned by a special messenger), and Madge is a suppressed young hostess, because she will put her dear old aunt so prominently forward. But, for all that suppression, she is quite enough of a queen to command attention from this one who looks upon her for the first time.

She sees that he is noticing the effect of each shade and each ribbon. She feels that he appreciates her taste in setting forth such beauties as she has. And so when he comes near her in the course of the evening, and touches her dress, and says (letting the light fall on its semi-transparent texture):

"Is this idealized silk, Miss Roden, or is it a thing that every-day women may buy and wear?"

"Yes, at six-and-eightpence a yard. And how exactly you are like my Philip; he raves about this color," she says, with a great big effort at being all she ought to be. And then she concentrates herself, and asks him the question she has been long-ing to ask ever since he came upon her unexpectedly in that revised old English garden.

"Have you seen much of him in town?" He must have been so sorry that you came away just as he went back."

She says it inquiringly, wistfully, dejectedly, and he does not know how to answer her. He has been loving and loyal to his ne'er-do-well cousin all his life, but his love and loyalty are most sorely tried now. "Graceless as he is, how can he fritter away such an opportunity?" the true Philip questions. But no answer is accorded him, and he has to say something.

"I've been unlucky enough to miss him," he says, vaguely. "In town, you see, your time is not your own, and you're always missing the very people you want to meet. It's always a white-stone day to me, when I do meet Philip," he continues with energy; and Madge looks at him with a gaze that seems to penetrate into his soul.

The girl is a puzzle—a sublime puzzle to him. Is she acting, or mad, or only childish? Still, when she suddenly leans nearer to him, and asks:

"You can tell me!—have I done well or ill? The truth now—the truth!"

He pauses. Shall he speak it?

CHAPTER XV.

DESPAIR!

"Love can hope when Reason would despair."

ENGAGED to Madge! owning his engagement! Standing there before her, with that love-light in his eyes, affianced to another woman! Olive tries to take in the truth and cannot.

It is the very worst that has come upon her now, she tells herself, and her hands even seem numb with this pain that can't be combated, with this deadly assailant of her peace that can't be grappled with. There is something terribly piteous in the girl's utter inability to be other than fond of him still, though he has been so faithless to her.

He proceeds to explain, and extenuate—after the manner of men. And after the manner of women, she listens, and is lenient.

"I can't tell how it came about," he says. "It would all have been different, you know that, Olive—if you hadn't cast me adrift in the way you did; and Madge"—

"Don't say a word about Madge," she shivers, and then she adds, in her fruitless, candid wrath:

"I could trample on the throat of any other woman in the world who crossed my path. How you ought to love her!"

He is sitting on the bench still, his arm resting on a rustic, half-decayed table in front of it, his face bent down, and his soul sick with the conviction that he will always go on missing the best that the world can give him. And she is standing about before him, wrapping her shawl around her and loosening it, resting now on one foot and now on the other, feeling it equally hard to be near him and to go away from him, greedily divining every expression of his face, and feeling them all so unsatisfying.

She recalls every lingering pressure of the hand, every love-lighted glance, every endearing epithet that he has lavished upon her lately, and she longs, she yearns, to be told that they were not all a cheat. This love that he had depicted with such deceiving skill—is it all a lie?

"How could you do it?" she gasps out; and this is the only accusation she makes, but it pierces through his selfish coat of mail.

"If I could undo it, I would," he stammers out earnestly. "But that would only be perjuring myself to her, and doing no good with you. Forgive me, Olive!"

He rises up and goes to her as she flutters about in her misery on the gravel-path, and holds his hands out, and bends his head down toward her in a deferentially loving way that makes her brain whizz and her heart beat; and he is Madge's Philip, she recollects, and, after this day, all interest in him must be crushed out of her heart.

But still, for all this saving recollection, she lets him take her hand and draw her to him, and a thrill of rapture relieves her anguish for a moment as he says:

"I love you, Olive—I've always loved you; believe that of me to the end."

Her white, wistful face lifts itself up, and deep in her eyes he reads a portion of the passionately intense misery that he has inflicted upon her. This is love, he knows; such love as gracious, happy Madge will never lavish upon him; such love as can only exist in the heart of a girl who has a strong element of recklessness in her nature.

He remembers well how he labored strenuously at first, long ago, to make this girl care for him; remembers how carefully he planted the love that looked so fair a flower, and that has turned out such a noxious weed to poor Olive, who nourished and cherished it. He remembers how he left her; how he wooed her by every means in his power when accident threw them together again. And as he remembers all these things, he loves her as he knows he will never love another woman, be the other good, kind, and fair as an angel.

"Olive," he says, pressing her hands together in his own against his breast, "my darling, I've been mad, I think—mad, to believe that I could exist without you, without your love and kisses—mad to imagine that Madge Roden's cool, complacent regard could ever compensate me for the loss of your thrilling words and tones. Let us be what we were before: be my wife, and, whatever comes of it, I shall be happier with you than without you."

She shakes like a reed in his strong embrace; her brain can't clearly entertain this idea which he has put before her as such a plain possibility, when only the minute before it had been such an utter impossibility. "His wife!" She whispers the words as he stoops and kisses her wildly, desperately. And then she understands everything as he ceases, and looks away from the face he has been gazing at with such rapture, and she sees he is pale and gloomy.

But still his hand caresses her silken hair; still her hands are palpitating in his grasp. Can she give up all this? can she renounce him at the call of either friendship or honor?

She questions herself thus in a dreamy kind of way, and then suddenly she rouses herself, and says:

"And what of Madge?"

"Oh! I must break it off with her as decently as I can," he says, almost savagely; for he is beginning to repent himself already of that burst of passionate feeling which induced him to make Olive such an offer. He is beginning already to have visions of the many disagreeables that will beset his path, if Olive is "foolish enough to take him at his word."

She reads every thought that is in his mind, and, with a wrench that nearly tears out her heart-strings, she frees herself from his arms, and stands back out of his reach.

"Keep your engagement with Madge," she says, quiveringly, for she is sorely shaken by this storm; "keep your engagement with Madge."

"Do you mean this, Olive?—do you reject me?"

"Reject you? Didn't I see the repentance in your face—the regret that you should let yourself be led into saying it the minute after you asked me? Reject you! Don't I know that you'd hate me, if I were weak enough to come between you and fortune? for it's Madge's fortune you love, Philip, not herself. Reject you! Oh! this is the worst of all, that you should have let me see what it cost you to offer me what you thought a reparation."

He expostulates, beseeches, explains; but the burden of his strain is that he is helpless. A man can't marry, and live on nothing. No fellow is justified in dragging a girl down into poverty, however much he loves her. The gratification of passion at the expense of principle, in his case, would be as ruinous to her as to himself. All this in broken, pathetic tones, that accord terribly well with the deep, loving tenderness of his eyes.

She grows calmer presently, and struggles to separate from him with dignity.

"After all this—this cruel mockery," she says, "we mustn't meet again. There would be more pain to me in seeing you, and knowing that you felt you could dare to insult me by seeking me,

than even I could bear. You have made my life a howling wilderness, indeed. But there is one person I pity more than I do myself, and that is the girl who is to be your wife."

She stops, out of breath with her vehemence and her anger, and he admires this phase of Olive intensely. "What a spirit the girl has! If only she had a little money!"

"Madge is more to be pitied than you are," he says, slowly. "She will never, in all her life, win such love from any man as you have won from me."

"The better for her," Olive says, sharply; "such love as yours is poison; and when once it gets into the veins, it never gets out again. It will taint all my life, Philip, but I'm glad I've had it."

There is something glorious about the girl as she said this. Philip recognizes something of the devotedness of her nature, and can't help appealing once more to it.

"You'll never hate me, will you, Olive?"

"Hate you! gracious, no," she answers, impatiently. "Hate you! why I could be happy if I could hate you, or get indifferent to the sound of your name and the thought of you. What a comfort it would be to forget you!" she adds, abruptly. "What a comfort to marry some kind fellow, and forget you!"

He looks at her wondering; is her mind going? He half fears that it is, and a poignant pang of remorse is his portion for an instant. Then she relieves him of that dread by saying:

"Don't think me distraught or dreadful at all for saying that; most girls would have had the thought in their minds, and not have said it; but I don't think it worth while to have any further concealment from you. I can't sink any lower in your estimation."

"Olive!" he interrupts, in real dismay.

"I mean it, I know it," she goes on imperiously. "Didn't you let me see—didn't you show me as plainly as you ever showed a fact to a fool in your life before—just now, that you felt wofully sad at the idea of my becoming your wife? I saw your rage at your own honorable weakness. I saw your dread at my taking advantage of it. I saw the depth to which I had fallen, and—I can't clutch at the straw of a shadow of reticence any longer."

"You have conjured up a wrong—created an insult," he cries, in real distress. "I asked you to be my wife, and you turn upon me and overwhelm me with an amount of self-abasement that's ten times harder for me to witness than any scorn of myself would be; you held me in your hand, and flung me!"

"Where you directed me," she bursts out. "It's over and done with, and now this is 'life's farewell to the hope of a moment.' Good-bye, Philip; try never to let me look at your face again."

She is holding out both hands, and he touches them and turns from her, bitter and broken in spirit, crushed and humbled, and sorely sick at heart.

And she stands there with the damp mists gathering about her, and the low moaning wind sounding in her ears, muttering "good-bye, good-bye," as long as she can see him.

"It was their last hour—a madness of farewells." There can be no more pain in this world for her, she tells herself as she slowly walks in. After this, nothing can hurt her; after this, nothing can humiliate her; after this, nothing can surprise her.

She shrinks with an altogether unaccountable shrinking from going in and facing Mrs. Tollington, for she hears that lady's chariot-wheels coming along the drive. Is it possible that cruelty has made her a coward? No, no; Mrs. Tollington and every other atom of humanity will be powerless to distress her from this time forth.

So she tells herself in her ignorance.

The day is dark, dreary, and damp. It cannot be the bracing atmosphere, therefore, that has imparted this unwonted flush to Mrs. Tollington's fair face. That lady greets Olive with a keen flashing glance, with a sharp, cutting inquiry:

"May I ask, Miss Aveland, why you entertain gentlemen surreptitiously in my absence, with whom you appear to be on most distant terms in my presence?"

The fair, delicate-looking woman has a power of

spiteful fury about her in spite of her limp languor. Like a cross cat's, her eyes change from their normal hue of blue to sparkling, scintillating green as she interrogates Olive, and waits for Olive's reply. "Appearances are against her again," Olive feels with a qualm, and as she feels it, she knows that there are other stabs that wound frightfully, besides those that are given in love's conflict.

She makes an effort—a supreme effort to be coherent and collected, and says:

"Mr. Fletcher called on you, and, not finding you at home, he chose to come into your garden; it is not my place to turn your friends out."

"A false, paltry, pitiful evasion," Mrs. Tollington cries, in shrill, insulting tones that she would not venture to employ toward her cook or housemaid. "Maria saw what was going on from the window; and I'm ashamed of you, Miss Aveland—ashamed that such deceit and depravity should exist in one whom my husband trusted so-o blindly."

Mrs. Tollington raises her voice, as she says this, in a melodramatically hysterical way, and Olive knows that the servants are in the hall listening, giggling, delighting in her being called to account for what they will consider a sly and underhand interview with "her young man." She knows it, and her shaken strength gives way as she realizes that through him she may be again cast out, as she was from Mrs. Wilmot's, with a stain on her fair name. There is no pity in the vain, mocking, triumphant face opposite to her. Down goes her last barrier of defense, her self-possession, and she sobs out:

"Oh! Phil, Phil, it is hard!"

"Upon my word," Mrs. Tollington flings out the words with vicious velocity, "this is a little more than I can endure. If you are not engaged to Mr. Fletcher, you must please to leave my house at your earliest convenience. Nothing short of a positive, recognized engagement could make me sanction such extremely indelicate conduct."

"I will leave your house at once," Olive says, starting up.

"You are not engaged to him, then?" Mrs. Tollington cries, with an eager interest that she herself would have instantly denounced as criminal if exhibited by any other married woman.

"That I decline to tell you," poor Olive says, trying to speak coolly, and feeling, in the midst of her misery, a tiny thrill of satisfaction in baffling the curiosity of the insatiably vain creature who believes that, but for her Tollington, every man who comes near would instantly offer to lead her to the altar. And Mrs. Tollington makes up her mind that she will give that "exceedingly imprudent young man the benefit of the doubt, and extract the truth from him concerning Olive at the earliest opportunity. A sweet sympathetic friend is such a safeguard to a young man," she tells herself. And she resolves to be that safeguard to him at their next meeting.

But, in the meantime, Olive (whom she involuntary fears) must go.

A dreary hour or two of packing up ensues, for Mrs. Tollington has said that she must go, and Olive has no desire to stay on sufferance. But the faithful, bruised heart is very despairing, as she reflects that, when she goes from this callous creature's house, she has no friend to whom she can turn for protection, comfort, refuge.

For she would rather lie down and die of her desolation at this juncture than go back to the good, loving, generous-hearted young mistress of Moorbridge House "who holds Philip in her toils."

There is abominable bitterness in Mrs. Tollington's last words to her.

"Until this affair is cleared up, don't apply to me for a recommendation; I couldn't conscientiously give you one. The way you have practiced on Captain Tollington's credulity is too distressing to me."

"A less devoted wife than you are might be suspected of frantic jealousy concerning Mr. Fletcher." Olive finds the courage and the voice to say these words, and then drives away, leaving behind her a foe who will neither forgive nor forget—nor forbear.

Philip Fletcher meanwhile has gone back to town with the doleful feeling upon him that he has done with the best part of his life, and that

all that is to come, thoroughly authenticated as it is, will be dull, tame, and unprofitable.

But still he assails his conscience, and tells himself that it is Olive's vacillation, Olive's hesitation and weakness, which have brought things to this pass.

"If she'd only had the pluck to take me at my word, without going into heroics," he thinks, half-regretfully, during the first half hour after leaving her. But, by the time the train palpitates into the London Bridge station, Philip is sufficiently himself again to feel:

"It's a jolly good thing that Olive had more prudence and consideration than I had just now. A fellow who jilted Miss Roden could never hold his head up in society again."

By way of compromising with the Nemesis which he begins to think it just possible may overtake perfidy in time, Philip writes to Madge Roden, as soon as a good dinner at his Club has restored his mind and body to their just balance.

Writes a long, loving, amusing letter to Madge—the sort of letter that lingers in one's mind, by reason of the many pleasantly turned sentences (none of them too long) that abound in it—the sort of letter that shows a man recognizes the "mind" as well as the "heart" claims of his future wife.

"All business that keeps me from you is of necessity hateful to me," he concludes. "I am thankful to say that my business is finished, and I'm free to go back to dear Halsworthy."

CHAPTER XVI.

A FALSE STEP.

He cannot give earnest, unbiased consideration to the question Madge has thus unexpectedly propounded to him, because of the entreaty in her eyes. A vague idea hovers about in his mind that this girl, who is as little artificial, and as fair and sweet as a wild rose, has not "done specially well" in engaging himself to his cousin, who has no particular claims to be regarded as anything but a scamp. But he also has a vague idea as to the traditional fate of the man who interferes. So he steps off the delicate ground on to which she has suddenly whirled him, and says:

"That remains to be proved; but, at a venture, I should say that it is impossible for you to do ill."

"You are what I ought to be—reserved," she says gently; and then she remembers the relationship between the man of whom she is thinking, and the man to whom she is speaking, and adds generously:

"I shall tell Philip, as soon as he comes back, that I gave you an opportunity of saying something chilling and unpleasant about our engagement, and you did not take it."

"I shall never be able to say anything that isn't warm and pleasant about it, for I can never feel anything else," he answers, in simple faith, believing that he can guarantee his conduct for the future, as honestly and fearlessly as he can let the light of day upon it in the past.

"And your mother and sisters, will they like me too?"

"Like! they'll love you," he replies, quickly; and Madge nods her head backward and forward, and says, abstractedly:

"For Philip's sake. Well, you must all be very fond of him; the readiness to like me proves that. You must be very fond of him."

"We are," he says briefly: "but it would be no very difficult matter to be very fond of you, even if we were not of him."

"But they don't know me yet," she says, startled out of the quiet composure which had been her portion all the evening. And he knows that in some way his tongue had slipped, and words have fallen from it that it would have been better to have left unuttered. And so he compels himself to be commonplace and a little crushing.

"You won't accept the little compliments that are common coin, Miss Roden. You're right; I'll never offer you one of the sort again. No, they don't know you yet; but when they do, I have no doubt that you will all get on capitally together for Philip's sake."

She is conscious of being mortified—conscious.

that her mortification is showing itself in the heightened color and foolish glistening of the eyes which mortification is accustomed to display. The impulse to recover her self-possession by the means of forcing him to confess that his last words were not uttered in sincerity, is strong upon her. But she curbs it—conquers it—puts it down under her feet and tramples upon it.

"I would get on capitally with anyone, for Philip's sake," she says. And Phil thinks that it must be a fine thing for "a fellow to get a girl to love him so entirely" as Madge portrays that she does by this speech. Little he knows how far more entirely another girl loves that spendthrift of affection, his graceless cousin.

Presently (they neither of them know that it would be well for them to separate on the spot, and never strive again to excite a particle of interest or emotion in one another's breasts) Philip tries to extricate himself from the web of perplexity this girl is innocently weaving around him, by saying:

"How rapidly one adapts one's self to new relations: here we are talking as if we were brother and sister already!"

"Are we?" she interrupts, doubtfully. "Now, to my mind, brother and sister would have spoken a truth or two to each other that you and I are holding back. I'll try to do my part now. I wish you had come down when Phil was here first!"

"Why?" he asks, without intending to ask it, after the manner of the majority who indulge in questions.

"Because, if you had been here with him, the temptation to personate you would never have been put in his path; and it's that you all, yes, every one of you think of, and seem to extenuate when you speak of him to me."

"I never did, Miss Roden," he says, hurriedly; "really, I never thought of it as other than a foolish or, say, a wild burst of effervescent spirit that has ended in the soberest delight. The end justifies the means, even if the means had been far more reprehensible than they were."

He says all this sketchily, clumsily, angrily, for he knows that she will not believe him. And Madge adds to all these uncomfortable feelings by replying:

"I give up at once, if you say things in sentences to me—sentences that other people have arranged. I can't attend to you, and I can't answer you, and I can't believe in you!"

Thus far they go, this first day of meeting, and to all outward seeming it is a very little way. But Madge is gifted with what must prove to be either a great blessing or a great curse to her, namely, an exceptionally good memory. She not only never forgets what other people have said to her, but she always remembers what she has said to them. And so, when the exigencies of life in Halsworthy bring her into communion with Phil the following morning, she remembers, and remembers with a blush, that her own words have put him on his mettle to be as frank with her as seems good to him.

Contrary to her usual habit, Mrs. Henderson has avoided making Madge her theme during the brief period which Phil the genuine has spent with her (Mrs. Henderson) alone. Sad recollections clog the ordinarily fine utterances respecting Madge which all who know Mrs. Henderson are accustomed to hear from her lips. She thinks of all those idle hopes and wishes which she had indulged in respecting this pair whom fate has thrown together, now that honor forbids the realization of those hopes and wishes. She is a good, thoroughly human woman; and though there is something sacred to her in the first pledge of love made by a pure young girl, she is full of sympathy for the possibilities which might have been, if only Philip the true had come first.

Accordingly she does not dare to make Madge her topic; does not dare to respond when he strives to make Madge his topic. He is much impressed (so much is evident) by this girl whom his cousin has won for his bride; she has interested him; if he only suspected how much, he would leave Halsworthy to-day.

It is in vain that Mrs. Henderson tries to talk to him about his mother, his sisters, his own prospects, his attention wanders, and he gives vague answers, and vague fears enter in and abide in

Mrs. Henderson's heart. "Yet, after all," she asks herself "what can happen? It is not in Madge to play fast and loose with a mouse, much less with a man."

But, for all these reassuring speeches which she makes to herself, the vague fears go on obtaining dominion and enfeebling her nerves. She is conscious that she is presenting herself in the character of a bore to the son of her old friend, when she assiduously knocks down every little subject connected with Madge which he sets up. She is conscious of the fact, but, in her dismayed perplexity, she can't help herself; for she knows that she has aided in weaving the web in which Madge is getting entangled.

Presently he says (and her anxious ears fancy that he says it hesitatingly):

"I accepted an offer of a horse for to-day from Miss Roden, and said I would go there about twelve for it."

As he looks at his watch, Mrs. Henderson sees in his bent face more beauty, more power, more feeling, than she has ever seen in his cousin's—sees it, and sorrows at seeing it, for Madge must see it too.

"I will walk up with you," she says, feeling that she is intrusive, suspicious, ungenerous, and yet not daring to remain quiescent. "I want to speak to Aunt Lucy; we may as well go up together."

So they go up together, and find Madge lounging in a big chair before a big fire, making no pretense of doing anything but shiver.

"I tell her she has caught a chill, and I want her to go and walk it off, or ride it off," Aunt Lucy says, anxiously appealing to the visitors to second her advice. And Mrs. Henderson turns a deaf ear to Aunt Lucy's words, and says with outward boldness and inward terror:

"Is it a chill, Madge; or are you disappointed by not having had a letter from Philip?"

"I have had a letter from Philip, and he is coming back at once," Madge says, with animation. Then she takes his letter from her pocket, and reads the last words of it: "I am thankful to say my business is ended, and I am free to come back to dear Halsworthy." "I am so glad you two will be here together," she adds, looking up at Phil, and unexpectedly surprising him with the look of that interest in his eyes of which he is unconscious yet.

"What business can Philip have in town that we don't know of?" he catches himself wondering; but aloud he says:

"I'm glad, too. I have been looking forward to some days on old Exmoor with him."

Madge folds her letter up, pockets it, and subsides back into her chair again, and Aunt Lucy's quick eyes detect a tiny shiver.

"You have taken a chill, I'm sure of it, Madge; and nothing ever cures your colds so quickly—before they come to anything," she explains in parenthesis—"as a gallop on the moor. The air is so beautiful and fresh, you know, Mr. Fletcher, that it's physician and nurse at the same time, my poor brother used to say."

"I really think Madge had better nurse her cold to-day, instead of going out," Mrs. Henderson feels a fresh crop of fears spring up with each sentence that Aunt Lucy lets fall. With a keen, sudden glance Madge detects these fears; with an equally sudden resolve she determines to brave them. For the first time in her life, she feels inclined to rebel against that old friend's advice. For she has done nothing, has thought nothing, has felt nothing, that can justify this dawning suspicion.

"I think Aunt Lucy is right," she says, resolutely; "a gallop on the moor will do me all the good in the world. I caught a chill from the cold looks of those cousins of Grif's. I shall forget them when Brunette and I have had a burst." And she rises up and lays a hand on Mrs. Henderson's shoulder, and gives a look of innocent, comical defiance that makes Mrs. Henderson's heart ache with love and fear.

"Will you ring the bell for me, please?" Madge says, looking at Philip; and as he obeys her, she utters the words that Mrs. Henderson has been expecting and dreading:

"Didn't you say you'd ride to-day?"

Before he can answer, Aunt Lucy interposes:

"Then you'll have an escort, dear—much nicer

for you than riding alone; and Madge won't have a groom behind her on the moor," she adds to Mr. Fletcher.

And so, through no effort on his own part, it comes about that Phil goes out for a ride with Madge. And as he swings her up to her saddle, as he marks her grace, her ease, her skill, her beauty, his heart beats high with pleasure, the source of which he does not pause to analyze.

The horses afford them subject of conversation for a short time. The great merit of her good brown mare, Brunette, is a theme of which Madge is never tired. For the sake of making Madge eloquent, Phil ventures upon ground which is foreign soil to him.

"I thought ladies liked something rather slimmer than Brunette," he begins, scanning the strong, big brown mare with what he means to be a critical eye.

"Weedy horses are all very well for the flat," Madge says, carelessly, though in her heart she is annoyed at the least reflection being cast even in ignorance upon her favorite's splendid proportions; "but, for a hilly country, bone and muscle are as requisite as beauty and breeding—aren't they, Brunette? and you have all four, haven't you, Brunette?"

"Brunette is on a grand scale, and her manners have all the repose of caste," Phil laughs: "but I thought ladies who rode well liked horses that shied about and showed off."

Madge turns lightly about the eighth of an inch in her saddle, and leans her hand on the back of the saddle and surveys him calmly and closely for a moment.

"Now why will you talk of what you know nothing about, for the sake of saying something, when we would both of us just as soon not speak?" she says, quietly. "How do you know I ride well?"

"How do you know that I know nothing about it?" he retorts, laughing.

"I'll prove my assertion by putting you to the test of asking you to prove yours. I do ride well—of course, I know I do; now you tell me how you know that I do."

"The effect is superb, and it would not be superb if you failed in any one promoting cause."

"Polite, but not satisfactory," Madge says, meditatively; "however, what are the promoting causes?"

"Your figure, your skill, your courage, your grace," he cries, laughing delightedly; for all this brings him into greater intimacy with Madge, and little reck he what that intimacy will eventually cost them both.

"Less and less satisfactory, Mr. Phil. Now listen: I've seen a woman with the figure of a Venus, and the grace of a Lady Hamilton, and the courage of a lioness, ride awkwardly and badly. I'll tell you why I ride well, you poor, dear ignoramus, and then when you want to win some lady's heart by subtle praises of her horsemanship, you won't blunder and say flattering words of the performance that prove you to be stronger in faith than in knowledge."

"I shall never try to win any woman's heart by flattering her," Phil interrupts; "indeed, I doubt if I shall ever try to win a woman's heart in any way."

"Pooh! nonsense!" Madge says, prosaically.

"Why should I?" Phil asks foolishly, with gathering gloom; "what am I, and what have I to offer, that any woman worth marrying should give me a second thought, much less a thought of love?"

As he pauses here and looks at Madge, she feels she ought to say something. All she can think of saying is:

"Really, I don't know."

"No; nor does anyone else," he laughs, and recovers himself, and Madge makes an effort to change the current of the conversation.

"We have wandered from our text; shall I take up the broken thread and tell you the what and the why of my riding well?"

"Tell me—tell me anything you like," he answers, beginning to experience that rare delight in the mere sound of her voice which one does experience weakly enough once or twice in a lifetime, in the voice of a fellow-creature.

"Listen then; my figure might be fifty times as

good as it is (it's not "impossible"), and if I could bend from the waist, and didn't sit back, and down, and square, I should look like a sack if I were fat, or a stick if I were thin; and I might have three times as much courage as I have, and it would avail me nothing if I bungled with my reins, or worried her mouth, or let Brunette feel for an instant that I wasn't ready for any impromptu performance to which she might treat me; and—you're not listening one bit!"

In her ardor she has turned round and looked at him, and his eyes are fastened upon her with a gaze in which there is not the faintest shadow of attention to what she is saying. There is a glow on his face, a light in his eyes, that some other thoughts and interests have conjured up.

The spell is broken. With almost a groan he recalls himself from a dazzling possibility that some demon had been dangling before his mental vision. The present is all that is his. And he dares not turn even that to advantage.

"I'm not an apt pupil, I fear," he says, sadly. "Never mind; the knowledge will never be useful to me in the way you proposed just now."

And as he says this, his horse puts his foot into a grass-grown hole, and Phil is flung forward some yards on the turf, where he remains without moving.

CHAPTER XVII.

FURTHER ASTRAY.

A MOMENT before he had been so animated, brilliant, full of life and vivacity, and now he lies flat on his face, motionless, with that inert look about his form that is so full of ghastly suggestions of concussion of the brain or spine.

Everyone who has been much in a hunting-field must have experienced some at least of the sensations that beset Madge in an instant. The shock, the horror, the sympathy, all these are felt by everyone who sees either a man or a woman thrown from a horse, unless either he or she promptly picks him or herself up again. All these Madge felt now—and she felt something more.

A blinding bitter grief that startles her as the thought, "He is dead," forces itself into her mind. The shaking hands can hardly guide intelligent but bewildered Brunette to the spot where he lies. The throbbing heart impedes her breath, so that she gasps as she springs down and bends over him, trying to realize—dreading to realize how much he is hurt.

The gray horse, whose false step has caused the mishap, is grazing in a docile manner on a patch of bracken close by. Brunette's snaffle-rein is over her mistress' arm. Madge, and these two horses, and a few stray rabbits and the trout in the stream, are the only living creatures near the man who may be dead or dying.

The desolation of it all strikes her forcibly, and with a wailing sob she kneels down and puts her arms round his neck, and strives to lift his head and turn him on his side. She turns him tenderly, lovingly, as she would a flower or a baby, and as she puts him in his new position, Brunette puts her soft warm nose against his cheek and gives an inquiring snort.

The sound of something touches some hitherto dormant spring of vitality, and Madge can't check a cry of joy as Phil opens his eyes. One arm is round his neck still, and she is bending so low in her efforts to move him that her quivering lips are almost touching his cheek. Before he realizes the dazzling vision, she has released herself, and is standing by his side.

For half an instant he blinks in perplexity, and then he too rises to his feet, "unhurt in brain or spine, thank God" she feels through every fibre of her frame, "but rather confused by a blow on the temple."

"Stunned, I suppose," he explains; "have I been lying there terrifying you long?"

"It seemed hours, but it can't be really," Madge confesses; "only I thought you were dead, and—it seemed a lifetime."

"Awkward of me not to see where I was going," he says with some vexation, expressed in tone and manner; "you were right, Miss Roden, I don't know anything about riding; it was unpardonable to give you such a fright."

"Never mind that; the joy of finding you're not

hurt much is the greatest I have ever had in my life," Madge replies unaffectedly, and so earnestly that it brings some of the life's blood back to Philip's brow; "you'll like to go back now, after such a shaking?" she adds.

"It would be wiser," he says, slowly, looking at her, and not thinking a bit of the shaking his fall had given him, "but I'll beg you to let me be foolish just for once; let us go on."

She protests and argues against going on very faintly for a while, until he assures her that he feels "no ill effects whatever from his fall," and then she gives in, and they mount their horses again, and ride on across the lonely, lovely moor.

Brightly the sun shines on the fading heather and the rich gold of the dying bracken. Sweetly the odors their horses' feet crush out of these two plants rise up and hang about them. Freshly the invigorating moorland breeze fans their brows and kisses their cheeks, as they ride on rich in beauty, and youth, and happiness.

She tells him legends of the grand old tract over which they are passing, legends of local love and local war that have a bewitching reality to her because she was born and brought up in the district, and has heard them from her babyhood. And whenever she touches on the old, old story, her voice and eyes deepen, and Phil wishes that he might so ride on ever.

Brunette is good across any country, and the gray follows Brunette's lead without giving his rider any trouble. Accordingly, they constantly jump the moor-land streams and strike off, straight for any point of rising ground that seems to promise a fair, extended view. The fascination of the wildness of the moor gets into their veins, and they "ride on through sun and shade" regardless of where they are going, and of how they are to get back.

It does not come upon them suddenly that they are losing their way. They are conscious of it, and speak and laugh about it at intervals, for Madge feels sure that she will presently see some well-known landmark which will enable her to steer for the right path back to the Halsworthy side of the moor. But time goes on, and no such landmark appears. And the day begins to die.

The bright, happy breeze begins to change into a strong howling wind that seems to be coming from every quarter of the heavens at once. Happily there is no rain, but the wind bites; and when they take the level and gallop, which they do at brief intervals, Madge has to bend her head down low in order to avoid the cutting blast.

"We may be miles from Halsworthy, or we may be close on its borders, for all you know, I suppose," Phil says at last. He is getting keenly excited, and he cannot define even to himself whether it is with pleasure or with pain.

"If we were anywhere near the Halsworthy border I should know it," Madge has to confess ruefully; "people should put up posts on the moor; I am so hungry!"

It is the plaint of healthy, happy youth. They have been riding for many hours now, and the moor breeze is brisk and appetite-engendering. "If I had only brought my flask and some biscuits," she says. "What can we do?"

Literally, they know not where they are, nor where they are going, and the day goes on dying as quickly as possible. Madge is in the frame of mind to look out for omens and magpies. Phil never in his life prayed so heartily for the appearance of a third human being as he is praying now.

Presently another ill befalls them. The gray develops what scarcely amounts to a lameness, "but a decided dip" in the leg which he had stuck into the grass-grown hole in the morning; and in mercy to him their pace grows slower and slower.

Unexpectedly the character of the land alters—there is still light enough in the sky for them to see that hedges appear, and trees crop up. They are off the moor proper, but in what direction they have come off it neither of them can tell.

It is dusk now, as they strike into a wild road, and they cannot see, though they hear cart-wheels approaching lumberingly. By this time the dip has become lameness of such a decided nature that Phil has been obliged to dismount and prowl along on foot. The light of stars is upon them as he accosts the carter with the words:

"Can you tell us the road to Halsworthy?"

He is sluggishly informed in the vernacular that the carter "doan't know un."

Madge now endeavors to extract information, and begins at the beginning:

"Where are we?"

"Here," is the simply veracious answer.

"What is it called?"

The excellent man addressed has toiled since six o'clock in the morning on little else save beer of a heady brew. Never in his life before has he been put through such a catechism. He resents it now stolidly by saying:

"Taint called nothing but a roa-ad."

"Where does it lead to?" Phil interposes in despair.

"To where be gwain," is the reply; "if 'e be gwain to Garbeston, go forrad, and if 'e be gwain on the moor, go thicky way." Then he cries "way" to a horse that wants to go on, and "g'long" to a horse that wishes to stand still; and passes out of the view of the pair, who realize at last that they are lost in the wilds.

Slowly and rather sadly they plod on now until they come to a precipice, down which they stumble, it being the only road. It is getting late now, between seven and eight o'clock, and Madge is suffering from poignant pangs of remorse for her imprudence. "What must poor Aunt Lucy and Mrs. Henderson be feeling? what must they be thinking? what must they be suffering?"

A glimmering light at the bottom of the precipice relights the torch of hope in her bosom. That same torch is ignited so easily in youth. "It must be a village, and we shall be able to get a horse for you, or a fly or dog-cart to take us home," she says, enthusiastically; and Phil agrees with her, though he hasn't the faintest shadow of belief in any such good fortune as a fly, or dog-cart, or saddle-horse befalling them.

The bottom of the precipice is reached, and they find themselves in a picturesque ravine, between the ridges of some of the border hills of wild Exmoor. They hear the sound of a gurgling stream, and the wail of the mighty moor blast, and, better than all else, they hear the sound of the blacksmith's hammer! Human habitations are near them, and in that sense of nearness they find infinite relief.

Abruptly, without the warning of a single house, they come upon a slight, unsubstantial shell of a place, before which a lantern and a sign are swinging. The lantern shows them that the sign is that of the "Hunter's Delight," a fine fat stag of Ten. And with a groan of relief, after the long strain of uncertainty, they pull up at the little shaky portal.

As they do so, a shabby small mail phaeton, drawn by a pair of champing, well-bred bay cobs, dashes up to the door, and with an impulse which she can't resist, and which has a marked influence on her future, Madge springs back, and vents her admiration of them aloud.

"Look! they're thorough-breds," she cries to Philip, who is engaged in ascertaining a few dreary facts, and as she says it and turns her beaming face towards the lighted passage (Madge always "beams" at the sight of a good horse), a weary old figure glides from an inner room.

A strange old figure, the sight of whom carries Madge back a hundred years into the realms of long, long dead-and-gone novels and plays. An old lady, of seventy at least, whose figure is concealed by a huge coachman's coat and capes, and whose face burrows under a half-high beaver hat tied down with big lappets—a product of the past—a something indigenous to the soil of Exmoor, evidently—a plump floury landlord (he turns out to be the village baker as well as the village Boniface) backs with trepidation before this apparition. A landlady, whose efforts to retain her gentility in this barren region have rendered her spare and bony and slightly snappish, regards the new-comers chillingly; but the lady with the big cloak and beaver hat greets them genially.

"Come in, my dears," she begins; "cold riding on the moors to-night, I should say; here's a fire," and, as she speaks, she pushes back a shaving that represents a door, and gives them a view of the room that looks like a partition is a deal box, at one end of which a bright peat-fire is burning.

"Come in," she says, "and be warm and comfortable;" and they go in, and are warm and uncomfortable.

The quaint figure follows them, and by the light of a solitary dip candle that is drearily fluttering itself away in a draught, they see her as she is.

A slim, supple old woman—enveloped as she is, they can see that she is this—brisk in movement, energetic in action, keen and alert in expression. The face the half-high beaver shadows almost gleams with a queer half-comic, half-suspicious smile as she surveys the young pair before her.

"I heard you speak of my horses," she says presently to Madge, "and I'll tell you that I have twenty at home as handsome, and some of them handsomer than they; I'm the Lady of the Manor; now tell me who you are—or who your husband is?"

Madge has a light and ready explanation of the real state of the case on her lips, and she is about to offer it. But something checks the utterance of the ringing soprano tones, and that something is the intense expression of emotion which overspreads Phil's face as the old lady's mistake falls on his ear.

He understands himself and his feelings clearly enough now. Madge's husband! It is what he would give half his life to be. It is what he may never even dare desire to be. Already he loves her with the love of a man who has never wasted his affection on every fair face that has come within his ken. Already he knows that she, and she only, represents all that he can ever love in woman or desire in a wife. Already he feels that he ought to leave Halsworthy the same hour that sees her safely home. Already he is wildly, madly, desperately sure that Madge understands some of this, and is not outraged by it.

They stand there silently, foolishly enough, illuminated by the one flaring dip, and keenly regarded by the gleaming gray eyes that sparkle out from under the half-high beaver hat. The expression which lights up Philip's face and betrays his feelings, has completely fascinated Madge. Pausing on the brink of the explanatory speech, she stands, with parted lips and rising color, looking at him—and not looking at him angrily. Before she can recover herself, before she can recall either Philip or herself to a sense of the allegiance due to the absent lover, the old lady comes to her aid.

"I beg your pardon, my dear lady; I've been a little premature, I see; he is not your husband yet." And here she pauses and nods her head, and informs Madge in a confidential undertone that she "had actually taken them for a pair of newly-married geese; but all the bloom is on the yeast still, I see; marriage brushes it off quickly enough."

While she has been speaking, Madge has made a mighty effort to resume that sovereignty over herself which had been shaken just now.

"He is the cousin of the gentleman I am engaged to," she explains as firmly as she can; and then she hands her card to the old lady, and asks her if there is any possibility of there getting back to Moorbridge House to-night.

Speedily and decisively that hope is annihilated.

"There is no possibility; you are twenty-six miles from Winstaple, and Halsworthy is on the other side of Winstaple."

"And my brute of a horse is lame," Philip grumbles.

"And I'm tired out," Madge says, throwing herself down on a chair and beginning to cry; "still we can't stay here."

She looks appealingly at Philip, and there is infinite distress in her tone and in her eyes.

"I will do whatever you wish," he whispers, eagerly. "I'll walk by you, if you like to try and ride on to-night."

"Mrs. Henderson will be so distressed," poor Madge goes on whimpering; "she didn't wish us to come; and now that this has happened—oh, dear! oh, dear! I don't know what to do."

"I'll tell you, my dear:" the strange lady has been listening to every word they have uttered, and scanning every look of theirs. And she knows all their story; ay! even more of it than they know themselves yet. She has been young herself.

"I'll tell you, my dear; you can't get home to-night, for there's no one to guide you, and no horse to carry your—friend; and you can't stay here,

that's certain; but my house is only half a mile off, and if you'll be my guests for the night, I'll drive you home the first thing to-morrow morning; so just step into my phaeton, and make yourselves as happy as you can."

They hesitate, but only for a moment or two, for it is the only alternative they have. And so, rather dispiritedly, they—but still with a sort of exultation—(about which they feel half guilty) they follow Mrs. Graves to her carriage, and are driven up and down a rocky road, through wild, unkempt pleasure-grounds to the door of a long, low house, where they are deafened by the vociferous barking of at least a dozen dogs.

CHAPTER XVIII.

LOST AND FOUND.

FIVE days have passed since Olive, the iniquitous, has been expelled from the virtuous portals of Mrs. Tollington's house. Five long, dreary, disagreeable days spent by the poor, forlorn girl in wandering about trying to get employment.

Naturally she is in London. Where else can women workers hope to find immediate work. The great Mart is the only place she knows to which she can bring such wares as she has—ah! "how poor her wares are," she feels miserably; "and how plentifully supplied everyone appears to be with them."

For five days she has toiled incessantly about the great labor market without avail. She has patiently waited her turn in at least twenty "Governesses Agency Offices," she had made two or three futile journeys into far-off suburbs at the call of ladies who "think she may suit," until they see her. And now she sits in her dusky bed-room in the boarding-house where she is staying, sick at heart, and sadly conscious that she must come down a rung of the social ladder if she wants to live.

The fees at the Agency Offices, and the inevitable omnibus fares, have terribly lightened the purse into which so very little money was put at starting; and her board and lodging is a heavy item, when compared with the slender resources on which she has to draw to pay for them. The boarding-house is kept by two ancient maiden ladies, and it is cheap, and not remarkably nice. But it is "highly respectable," and so poor Olive determines to stay there "while her money lasts," or until she gets employment.

How she hates her life as she sits here with feet that ache from having traversed acres of hard pavement this day—and traversed them in vain. Dejection of spirit has made her physically weak—as is always the case when the organization is fine. She is nearly in tears as she takes her place at the boarding-house tea-table, round which are seated eight or nine talkative, bustling women.

They all know that she is seeking employment as a governess or companion. They all know that up to the present date her search has been a vain one. They all know that she is out of heart—that she is poor—and that she revolts against these her surroundings. And yet God in His infinite mercy has made the larger section of humanity so gentle, that they pity and are kind to her according to their lights.

"Have we to congratulate you on better fortune to-day, Miss Aveland?" the senior sister chants, as she hands Olive a cup of tea. The senior sister is a good, kind creature, and whenever she has time to think about Olive, she does hope that that poor forlorn one "may soon meet with something good." Still the season has been a dull and empty one for the unprotected pair who are striving to live by means of the home they make for other women as unprotected, and poor, and anxious as themselves. And so while Olive's money lasts she is very welcome here.

"No," Olive answers, conscious that all eyes are upon her as the question is asked. "I'm getting weary of trying, even; people want so much in these days; if I had no conscience, and would only 'profess' to teach half a dozen things of which I know nothing, it would be all well; my employers would not find me out; but—I have a conscience, and so 'unsuited to the situation' is the verdict passed upon me wherever I have shown my face."

All the faces at the table turn toward her as she

speaks. She is such a brilliant young creature that she gathers all the interest the anxious-hearted women about her have left for anything in life but themselves. They admire a little, fear a little, condemn a little—but all like her.

"I suppose you wouldn't be anything but a governess?" one of them suggests, deprecatingly; and Olive is aware that there is a hard, ungrateful ring in her voice as she answers:

"I'd be a cook if I had the skill, or a house-maid if I had the strength requisite; having neither, I can only be a governess."

"If you wouldn't scorn the occupation," the old lady goes on, "I happen (quite by chance, indeed, *providentially*, as one may say) to know of something that would be, perhaps, better in the long run than a governess's situation, though of course not so genteel."

"Oh! don't say that," Olive interrupts; "tell me what it is; it would be vulgar to die of want—as I shall soon if I can't get work."

And then she remembers all she has lost for love, and would not regain it at the cost of the love she has known. Olive is a true woman!

With many a preamble, and many an apology, the scheme is propounded to her, and at the first hearing Olive shudders—shudders indignantly. It is this:

"With that lovely figure of yours, you would be invaluable in a show-room," the lady says, deprecatingly, "and I happen to know that they want a young lady in the mantle department at 'Barr and Battles'; most genteel young persons in the shop, I assure you; my own cousin is cashier there."

Poor Olive!

Little by little the possibility of doing what has been suggested to her, filters through and permeates her mind. She must do something. And nothing else is to be done. Therefore, she goes up and offers herself to the awfully critical eye of "Barr and Battle," and her shoulders are seen to be the right shape for showing off a shawl, and her figure is discovered to be replete with all the grace requisite for the disposal of a polonaise! And so she takes her place in the show-room, and inwardly renounces all her past life and its associations. Poor Olive!

The rate of remuneration offered by Barr and Battle for the manner in which she will display their polonaises and shawls is magnificent, when compared with the meagre sum she could ever hope to obtain as a governess. She is not to live in the house, as do a large number of her fellow-workers. But altogether, she is to be very safe, and respectable, and well-cared for in this lower sphere.

But after all, she does gird against the conditions of her life. She neither gives herself airs, poor, humbled, heart-sore creature, nor strives in any way to assume a superiority to her fellows which she does not feel conscious of. But she is not one of them! Her traditions are all of another life than theirs, and they intuitively feel that she is not of them though she is with them.

One day the mantle she is displaying to the best advantage for the benefit of a pair of badly-built young beings, who find everything "ungraceful," falls prone on the floor in limp folds, and she stands trembling and aghast as Griffiths Poynter stumbles forward, full of surprise, in which there is both joy and pain, to greet her.

Her fellows regard her jealously. The two young beings, who find everything ungraceful, regard her superciliously and suspiciously, for her beauty is as incontestable as is Grif's pleasure at seeing her again. And for the last few days they have been cultivating the feeling that Grif will eventually resign himself utterly unto them, his lawful cousins, until it has assumed the proportions of a fair flower of Hope. It is disappointing, irritating in the highest degree, to see it nearly uprooted in this way by "a young person in a shop."

They claim Grif's attention assiduously, they try to hurry him away, by pulling out watches he has given them, and avowing themselves "late for an appointment that they wouldn't miss for the world." But their efforts are proved futile. Grif's mind refuses to grasp anything beyond the great fact that Olive is Madge's friend, and seems to be most miserable. Possibly he may be of use

her. Possibly he may be enabled to give Madge some comforting tidings of her friend when he goes back.

"I must not keep you from your friends," she says, in a low tone, as the cousinly glances pierce her soul, and the idea enters in that one of them may be his bride elect; "men, as a rule, only go shopping with girls they are going to marry," she tells herself. There is nothing intrinsically beautiful about either of these girls; it can only be the sentiment that enables him to bear the sight of the awkward attempts they make at draping themselves gracefully.

Some of these feelings make themselves manifest in the indifferent glance which she lets fall on them. Some fine turn, of which she is herself unconscious, betrays itself in the half-averted head and lowered tones. They are very keen as to their maintenance of their dominion over Grif. They detect—and determine to denounce—all manner of subtlety in the demeanor of this "young person."

"You must give me your address, Miss Aveland," he says, handing out a note-book. "Madge will never forgive me when I go back, if I don't take a full report of you to her."

"She picks up the mantle she had dropped at the first sight of him, and with it she recovered her perfect self-possession.

"Take this report of me to Miss Roden," she says, coldly, "that I feel my old acquaintances can do me no greater kindness than to forget me."

"You'll let me call to see you?" he asks, in a state of flushed amazement. And Olive answers, definitely:

"No! my time belongs to Messrs. Barr and Battle. I have none to give to such idle follies as friendships and old associations.

He is heartily, unfeignedly, pathetically sorry. But she is "half sick of shadows," poor thing, and she thinks that all this earnestness of his may be a sham, and the sorrow a shadow. There is not sufficient sympathy between Griffiths and herself for her to hear the genuine ring of the metal in every word he speaks to her. And so she wishes to get rid of him! He is but a talkative interruption to her thoughts.

But even as she gives him a limp hand in farewell, even as she raises her languid eyes to give a last look at the fussy, unprepossessing young ladies who accompany him, an idea darts into her mind and permeates it. Supposing she marries this man? No one would be harmed, and it might make her forget Philip.

Quick as thought, all the worst of the woman comes to the fore, and causes her to change her tactics. He, seeing her relent, believes that sweetening, chastening thoughts of Madge are leavening her harshness of a minute ago, and he feels inclined to adore that absent influence.

His cousins seeing the change, crack the nut of truth, and extract the kernel as they whisper jealously to each other:

"She means mischief."

What she meant to do, and how she meant to do it, may not be told just yet. All that need be mentioned at this juncture is that she called Griffiths' note-book into requisition at last, and therein wrote down her address and an hour when she could receive him.

As in a dream, she goes on displaying articles of apparel to women far less fair than herself during the remainder of the day. As in a dream, she hears envious badinage from the many who were not fortunate enough to excite the admiration of Mr. Poynter, and the spleen of his cousins. As in a dream, she lays a train that will sear her sadly when it explodes.

Phil Fletcher has roughed it considerably during his journey through the world. He has seen a goodly portion of the darker side of life, and he has no "kid gloves," "perfumed curl," and "lascivious lute" proclivities. He has never gone in for the character of "curled darling," or fastidious man of fanciful habits. Yet he stares aghast when he finds himself, with Madge by his side, well inside Mrs. Graves's portals.

They have effected an entrance through a spacious conservatory, wherein there is not so much as a leaf, far less a flower, to break the monotonous glare of glass. It looks like a tank, and smells like a charnel vault, and Madge shiv-

ers as she passes through, and thinks more regretfully than ever of Mrs. Henderson's face of patient protest against the ride which has ended in this. She shivers in a more pronounced manner presently when the house door of the conservatory is opened by a dwarfed female servant whose face was cut across from the right temple to the left point of the jaw by a deep, red wound that looks stiff, and sore, and altogether revolting.

She admits them into a big musty hall hung around with coarse sporting pictures of fifty years ago; with otter heads, and foxes' tails, and the antlers of the red deer. The odor of the vault, of a dead and rapidly decaying respectability, is over all these things.

The sound of a dozen tongues raised in anger, in mirth, in revelry, in savagery, reeks in from the back regions. The handmaiden with the gash across her face, and a candle held at the best angle for guttering, stands and stares at the unwonted apparition of two handsome, clean, intelligent-looking human beings. Six of the dogs have effected an entrance, and are yapping and yowling over a big loaf of bread which they have dragged from some recess. Six more are howling their protest outside, against their unjust exclusion. Slightly in the background the mistress of the mansion stands, keenly observant of the effect of all this on her unexpected guests.

"Welcome to my house," she breaks into the midst of their amazed meditation with a suddenness that makes them both start. "Dorcas" (this to the girl who had admitted them), "call Mr. Graves; tell your master I want him."

The girl shambles away on her mission, and Mrs. Graves leads the way into an apartment from which apparently fresh air has been excluded for the last century. There is in it an odor of apples, of tobacco smoke, of stale beer, of poultry, of musty books. As the feeble light falls on surrounding objects, Madge sees masses of rare old china piled up, together with common modern crockery, on a sideboard, above which hangs a superb Canaletti, and an indisputable Sir Joshua, together with some penny-colored prints and appalling photographs. "It is the end of the world, and we have tumbled into chaos," she whispers, as her hostess goes out of the room, and the young pair involuntarily draw nearer to one another.

"It is but an episode that we shall laugh over heartily with Philip," Phil says, reassuringly, as he takes observant notes of a new-born look of fear in Madge's eyes. But though he says this with the greatest sangfroid he has at command, he knows within himself that it is an episode which will set its mark on the after-lives of both Madge and himself.

He knows that, do what he will, struggle as he will (and, poor fellow, he begins sadly to distrust his own strength and capacity for struggling now), an amount of intimacy will be developed between them which can never be forgotten, never obliterated, never remedied. When she turns to him with those beseeching eyes, full of half-pitiful, half-quaintly humorous appeal, what can he do but give her all the quick, sympathetic companionship she mutely pleads for.

Even now they stand nearer together, just for a moment, while Mrs. Graves goes out on some domestic mission connected with their sudden appearance. And as she inclines toward him, she forgets all stiff and conventional forms of address, and says:

"Oh! Phil, isn't this funny?"

"It's too delicious," he answers, earnestly, not thinking a bit of Mrs. Graves, or of Mrs. Graves's chaotic establishment, but thinking solely and wholly of the bright young creature by his side who at this juncture is depending on him very visibly.

"Delicious while we're together," she says, in that foolishly vehement way of hers that makes itself manifest whenever she is gratified or excited, "but it will be awfully dull to me when I can't look at you, and see that you see the fun of it no longer. I shall have time to gloom then about what they must be thinking at home."

The corners of her mouth drop pitifully here, for Madge is very tired. The breezes that blow off the moor are very health-giving, doubtless, but they are very prostrating in their immediate ef-

fects. Never in her life before has Madge longed so for a human shoulder on which to repose her weary young head. Unfortunately Philip's is the only shoulder near, and he is the "wrong Philip."

By-and-by a small strawberry-colored man shambles in, covered with grimy clothes that hang upon him as if he were an ill-made peg. He is closely followed by Mrs. Graves, who saves them from falling into the error of taking him for a tipsy groom, by presenting him to them in the character of:

"My husband—Mr. Graves."

There is a lamentable want of purpose about Mrs. Graves's words, and hands, and deportment generally. He experiences the most frightful difficulties with his knees and consonants. The first bend out helplessly, and have to be spasmodically straightened, and the second won't fall trippingly off his tongue. He is the first specimen of this kind of thing that Madge has seen, and she recoils from him, and gets nearer to Philip.

Nearer in seeming, and oh! how much nearer in reality, as he makes each movement that portrays trust and dependence upon him. Nearer to him, nearer to his heart every instant. And he dares not take her in and welcome her, because his cousin has won this blessing with a lie.

But when she puts her soft, clinging hand round his arm, and gives it a frightened clasp, and says:

"Oh! don't you wish we had never come?—don't you wish we had staid at home?"

When she says this, he is a fool, and in his folly he forgets many things he would do well to remember, and says:

"No, darling, no; for we shall meet again tomorrow." And Madge (failing Madge) forgets to rebuke him for calling her "darling."

Will she dream this night of the arrival of the lover for whose advent she has been waiting all her life? Will she welcome the real Happy Prince, and—find him not the Philip who came to Halsworthy first?

When morning dawns, will the thought in her mind, the thought that will make her spring to meet the new day, be this—that her fellow-traveler of the day before is waiting below to greet her—waiting below, as eagerly expectant of that greeting as she is? A fellow-sinner! A fellow-sufferer! (will she thrill, and hate herself), the lover of her life.

No; none of these thoughts and emotions will be hers for many a long day to come. But the presentiment that they are destined to overcome her finally is upon the loyal, loving girl, with painful power.

CHAPTER XIX.

BIRD OR DEVIL!

"I love thee so dear, that I only can have thee."

PRECEDED by the girl with a gash across her face, Madge, after those parting words of folly with Philip, goes to her chamber, and its influences are not soothing or cheering.

It is a spacious apartment; one candle is utterly insufficient to light up its dim recesses, so all that Madge sees at first is a desert of much-worn Persian carpet, and an oasis of bed in the middle of the same; the bed is a ponderous four-poster, the curtains of so dark a green that they look black by this faint light, hang from the posts like shrouds. At the head of the bed is a plume of feathers. "Bah! it looks like a hearse," she says, with a shudder of compulsion.

Dorcas puts the candle down, stumps to the door, and gets herself away without uttering a word. As the echo of her footsteps dies away in the corridor outside, poor Madge's heart stands still, and then thumps audibly with uncontrollable fear. Supposing anything (she does not attempt to define a possible object of dread) should come out of one of those dark distances and frighten her, where should she flee, and on whom should she call? and, oh, how awful this loneliness is to her!

In ordinary circumstances, and under ordinary conditions, Madge Roden is the reverse of a coward. But her courage fails her now, for circumstances have conspired to unnerve her cruelly today. She is so shaken by the events of the day, she is so startled at finding what a prominent place Phil has taken up in her mind, that all her self-control is forsaking her.

It is a dreadful room; she speaks a few reassuring words to herself once, and they seem to roll about and echo all around her. The walls are dark, and several even darker portraits hang upon them. These are powerfully-painted pictures; they seem to move as poor modern Madge does, and their eyes look into hers wherever she turns, and appear to gleam with sardonic intelligence.

On reviewing her progress up stairs to bed, it seems to her now that she walked through miles of corridors, past uninhabited rooms; she knows that, whatever happened, Phil would not hear her, even if she yelled all her horrors aloud. As this dark view of her desolation presents itself before her, she distinctly hears a soft rustle somewhere behind her, between herself and one of the paneled walls. And in a passion of terror, such as only highly organized and intensely sensitive people experience, she retreats into a corner of the room, and scans all she can of the rest of it with widely-distended eyes.

It is in vain that she tells herself that this is idle folly, foolish fear, contemptible weakness! The dread has overmastered her to such a degree that she is sure some ghostly fright will be given her before the blessed daylight crops in and ousts these grewsome shadows. Like a child, she longs to get into bed and bury her head under the clothes, but she cannot muster up courage to cross that wide expanse between her corner and that haven of refuge, the bed.

The candle is short and spare, and burns rapidly away; there are only three or four inches between herself and utter darkness. She watches it with fascinated eyes, and with a choking dread of its abruptly going out with a sputter before she can make up her mind to take the leap across to what seems like a sanctuary by comparison with her present position.

Her faculties of hearing and seeing intensify themselves; she peers into the shadows opposite, and it seems to her that the portraits on the wall are fluttering their preposterous wigs and affectedly flirting their fans; she is sure that their eyes are dilating, and their bosoms heaving, and oh! one of them heaved a sigh!

Madge, blind with terror, now takes a spring that carries her to the side of the bed, and there stumbles and falls short of reaching it, for it is higher than she has been accustomed to. Still the habits of courtesy, the habits of concealing feelings, the exhibition of which would give pain to others, the custom of her caste, in short, is upon her strongly. And in this extreme moment she does violence to her inclinations, and represses the yell of horror which wells up from her heart, and which her lips decorously decline to utter.

How shall she ever endure it? how shall she ever live through it until the blessed light comes and relieves her of the agony of uncertain outlines, and dim distances full of pictured forms that move, and eyes that dilate? Even as she half-unconsciously questions thus of herself, something palpitates behind her, and the light goes out with a sputter.

In an instant flash through her mind recollections so vivid, that they seem to be painted in bright colors of all the scenes of luring travelers to their own destruction which she has ever heard or read of. The palpitation behind her is no creation of her disordered mind. It is a reality, a genuine sound! She cannot reason it away, for it is growing, advancing upon her. This something intangible, which is at the same time real, crushes the blood out of her heart, and renders her half-senseless.

Frozen with horror, petrified by a fear that she cannot define, or something that she cannot analyze, the girl on whom so many fair, high hopes are set lies there alone until the morning. When the morning comes, when the "blessed light" for which she has so wildly yearned and prayed appears, she cannot take comfort from it; for the fever of her spirit has mounted to her brain, and Madge Roden is very ill, so ill that Dorcas wandering in, after much prompting, with a jug of hot water, finds it a task beyond her capacity altogether to make the "young lady know what's what."

Other and altogether new elements of confusion are introduced into that household forthwith. Poor, feverish, wandering Madge is placed on the

bed she had so vainly essayed to gain, and the dogs are turned out into a distant yard, and the doctor is sent for, and the owl is driven from the gloomy corner of the room from whence he had watched and fluttered at Madge the previous night. And when all these steps toward her present comfort and future restoration have been taken, it occurs to Mrs. Graves that "the gentleman ought to be told."

The gentleman in question is still sleeping the sleep of a sojourner serving his novitiate on the moor, while the doctor stoops over Madge and utters the ominous words "brain fever, brought on by cold and some shock to her nervous system." And it is this verdict on the state of his already idolized Madge that falls, with almost stunning force, on Philip's ears when he eventually descends to what resembles "the lower regions" in more senses than one.

At this juncture—out of the chaos of this realm of riot—the key-note of the proper mode of action is struck by an unexpected hand. The weird old mistress of this mansion of misrule comes forward with a perfect conception of the exigencies of the situation that staggers Phil for one minute, and compels his unwilling admiration the next.

"The young lady who is engaged to your cousin will be quite safe in my house, Mr. Fletcher, without any remote guardianship from you," she says, incisively; "but the sooner her other friends are with her the better; so I should advise your taking the fastest horse in my stable (the screw you rode yesterday is hopelessly lame), and going yourself with these poor tidings to her home without delay. The news will come more softly from you than from a groom."

In common sense, in common honor, in common decency Philip has no appeal against this decision, though he would give all such fortune as Fate may ever bestow upon him to be suffered to lie down like a watch-dog at her door. But he has no appeal; he knows that he would be worse than a fool to protest against this really right dictum which has been uttered from such an unlooked-for quarter. And accordingly he goes as Mrs. Graves bids him, and Madge remains in the house of a stranger, moaningly unconscious, quite alone.

The bracing air of wild free Exmoor has no power this day to brace the nerves of the messenger of woe, who "rides as though he were flying" in very truth, quite regardless of the broken nature of the ground, and the possibility of Mrs. Graves's bonniest blood-mare laming herself for life over it. He knows that he has been bitterly to blame in letting Madge lose herself, and he knows nothing of the innocent cause of Madge's final overthrow. Owls are constant visitors in the darker corners of the manor-house, and the servant who drove out the special one that fluttered like a thing of evil from the distance at Madge has never thought of mentioning such a common occurrence as its appearance and ejection.

As he gallops, by-and-by, through the long, narrow street of Halsworthy, emotions crowd in quickly upon him, and he begins to dread the look of stern displeasure which will gloom over Mrs. Henderson's face, and the agitation and tearfulness of which Aunt Lucy will bring to bear upon him when they hear his story.

The paramount thought in his mind as he rides up the avenue at Moorbridge is—

"It will be aiding her frail hand to the heart's suicide with a vengeance, if I let her marry Philip."

But this thought, with all its saving strength, deserts him suddenly, when, in answer to his impatient ring at the hall-door bell, a bewildered-looking servant opens the door, and Philip, his cousin, stands out clearly, tall, and fair, and handsome, and with an immense air of having a well-established right in all things behind that servant's head.

Philip, the messenger of ill-tidings, and Philip, the accepted lover, make all things clear (after the manner of men) in a few moments; but Madge's cavalier of the previous day has a tight time of it presently when he is brought to bay before the women, to whom Madge, and everything concerning Madge, is dearer than life.

He gets no pity from Aunt Lucy, he gets no help from Mrs. Henderson; the former is weeping, the latter is incapable of considering aught but Madge's

danger, Madge's suffering; the latter is sternly disinclined to salve a conscience that, from the bottom of her honest heart, she believes ought to be scared about Madge.

And through it all he knows himself to be so guileless in act and word. As for his thoughts! Heaven help him! Could he help them? They have never been given utterance to, they have never wronged her—save in that one weak moment when, out of his great love for her, and pity for her solitariness, he called her "darling."

The arrangements that are made, for once are all made with a propriety, a perfection that proves to Phil "the late," as he may be called, that he is unneeded, unwelcome. He has a wretched sensation of being scouted by Aunt Lucy, and suspected by Mrs. Henderson, and simply "suffered" by his cousin Philip. And so he does his duty in a very aggrieved and outraged state of mind, after all, and declares himself "ready to go back to town" directly Mrs. Henderson declares herself determined to go and nurse her favorite.

Philip the lover, Philip the prosperous and preferred, is, in the order of natural selection, "told off" for escort duty to the two ladies who are going over to aid and succor Madge. But before this dominant duty claims him, he has half an hour with his cousin.

When that half-hour commences, each man means so honestly "to have it out" with each other, but somehow each falls short of his meaning, and so the flame of truthful explanation wavers, flickers, fades away.

"I have never apologized to you for having used your sword and cocked hat, as it were, when I came a-wooing," Philip the lover begins, somewhat meanly; for it is mean to remind a generous foe-man of his former generosity when a fresh conflict is beginning.

"The only thing you could filch from me was my good name," Phil the leal says, laughing with an effort; "and as we share it together"—

"Blow the name, it's been the temptation!" Philip responds, savagely; "Phil! you've seen the girl—isn't she glorious?"

"Glorious!" the other replies, briefly.

"And this place isn't to be despised?" Philip goes on interrogatively, with the airy manner of a man who, never having possessed one square inch of his own, can gaily condescend to the indifferent contemplation of acres.

Phil is silent, surlily so; to him there is something brutal, coarse, unmanly in this talk of the place, when the possessor of it is so ill, "may be dying, for all we know," Phil thinks, in a burst of impotent love and fear.

"And yet," Philip goes on in a burst of self-satisfactory feeling, "with all this in my hand, as I may say, it proves me not an utterly selfish fellow, Phil. I'd give it all for a girl who has nothing in the world but her beauty and her love for me"

"Then why haven't you given it all for her?" Phil interrupts.

"Because—well, a fellow can't make all the 'reasons why' canter up into position at a moment's notice," Philip replies. "When I came down here for a lark (you know how awfully fond I always was of amateur dramatics), I didn't know what it would lead to; it has led to this! can you wonder at it?"

He asked this with an air of self-conceit that renders him insufferable to Phil. Briefly the latter says:

"When did you come down?"

"Yesterday, about four o'clock. I was disgusted, naturally, at finding Madge had gone out; and when she staid away all night I was more disgusted than ever. You ought to have been more prudent, Phil."

"I know it."

"Indeed, if it had been any other man than yourself," Philip goes on, "I shouldn't have accepted the situation in the quiet way I have now; as it is, I don't blame the girl nor you so much as I do those two fools of women who encourage Madge in all her silly escapades."

"Mrs. Henderson is incapable of encouraging anything silly," Phil says, savagely. In spite of the stern glances which Mrs. Henderson has been bestowing upon him with liberality this day, he will be just to her. She is incapable of encour-

CHAPTER XX.

AS GOLD IS TRIED BY FIRE.

aging folly in any form. She will not even smile upon a form of folly to which, in his heart of hearts, he does seriously incline—namely, that he should win the girl he loves from a man who loves her not.

Mrs. Henderson is one of the women who are prompt in action. She never hesitates, never vacillates, never gets fussy or bewildered in any sudden emergency. So now she comes back from the Vicarage, having set her house in order, and organized the system of management of it during her absence, long before agitated Aunt Lucy is ready to start.

"While I am waiting for Miss Roden, I want to have a talk with you, Phil," she says to the man who has proved himself such an inefficient escort and protector to Madge.

They are alone in the library as she says this (for Philip the lover has gone to get his new traveling-bag, with its beautiful assortment of bottles and brushes, ready), and Phil feels uncommonly like a culprit as he approaches his mother's friend.

She is a dear, kind, good woman, and she gentles very much in expression as the young fellow comes close to her, and waits his doom with miserable eyes.

She bends forward and rests her hands on his shoulders and kisses him on the forehead, and at that he breaks down, and, with his face in his hands, he says:

"I'll go to-day."

"I knew you would; I was sure of you, Phil, my boy. I wish none of this had happened; but as it has, you must be strong and true; you must right the wrong I have helped to do; you must not run into temptation, nor lead her into it."

"I'll go to-day," he repeats. And then she sits down and holds his hand as lovingly as his mother might, and asks:

"Tell me all there is to tell."

"There is nothing but this—I love her, and Philip does not!"

Mrs. Henderson winces as if a blow had been dealt to her.

"Don't say that, don't think that, Phil; he may not love her with the love a girl like Madge ought to inspire; but with his best, surely."

"Philip loves another woman with his best love, of whatever quality it may be," Phil says, with quickly repented-of angry candor. "But I know what you mean, two wrongs never made a right. Madge shall never know how I loved her, or how little it would cost him to renounce her."

For a minute Mrs. Henderson weighs the possibilities in the balance, and then she speaks:

"I know Madge—I know something about her that you have never thought of, and cannot realize. From her babyhood she has never broken her part of an engagement, however trifling it may be; she has pledged herself to Philip, and she will redeem her pledge, even if she finds out that he does not give her the full share of love she bargained for. Madge is honorable in the way men ought to be; she can't break her word."

There is unbroken silence between them for a few moments; then she speaks again:

"I tell you fairly, that I shall never speak of you to her, never suffer her to think that you regard her as other than the most superficial acquaintance; she is very pure, and very proud—she will soon compel herself to forget you."

He smiles sadly. "And that is the thought you give me at parting to comfort me."

"Go and work, boy," she says, impatiently; "go and work, and forget her. Because I have been foolish in smoothing the way to this engagement of Madge's, shall I stand by and see a greater folly committed; and—don't hate me, Phil, for my blunder! Be a man!"

He is quite master of himself as he takes leave of the relief-party that is going off to Madge presently—quite master of himself, as in well-chosen language he expressed his earnest hopes that "Miss Roden will shortly be restored to perfect health"—quite master of himself as he shakes his cousin's hand in farewell, and says, "you must keep my mother and sisters *au courant* with your proceedings, Philip; give them time to prepare the wedding presents, and make my peace with Miss Roden for my stupidity of yesterday."

But he knows that this mastery will not last.

Coming home one evening from the great emporium where she acts as block for the better display of the millinery triumphs of "Barr and Battle," to her lodgings hard by, Olive Aveland meets Philip Fletcher face to face.

It is the day before he goes down to Moorbridge House, and he has just been making thousands of good resolutions, each one of which he is ready to break at sight of the girl whose life he has laid waste.

At sight of him, Olive gasps a silent, heartfelt prayer for strength, and it is given to her. There is no flush on her face, no flutter in her voice, as she says, in answer to his eager:

"Olive, I have been mad to know where you were."

"There can be no pretense of friendship between us. No; I would rather not shake hands with you." And, as she says this, she walks on steadily, easily, and he stands and looks after her.

Presently he overtakes her again, and now there is anger in Olive's eyes as she regards him.

"I shall be wretched all my life," he begins, "if you cut me in this way. Have pity on me, Olive! you know how I love you—how I suffer in renouncing you; give me your friendship still."

"You traitor to Madge!" she cries in a low voice, but with an amount of concentrated passion in it that portends a perilous time for anyone who may encounter her in this mood, and run contrary to it; "you traitor to Madge—after I'd forgiven you about myself too," she adds, with a sudden breaking down of all her bulwarks, that is intensely weak and womanly.

Philip Fletcher likes to stand well with people—even with people whom he has injured. It is soothing to his own sense of satisfaction with himself always, in looking back upon past events, to remember that, whatever they knew about him, they could but seem to like him while they were with him. He values this personal power, which is his distinguishing attribute, highly; cherishes it, and appreciates it as the good friend it has been to him deserves to be cherished and appreciated. By its aid he has already tided over many a time of trial. The men of whom he has borrowed money, on account of it forgive him for forgetting to pay it. The women to whom he has pledged light love-vows, which he has never attempted to redeem, forgive him for perjury when he comes before them blithe and debonaire. It hurts him, after all that is past, that Olive should be in any other passion than one of love for him.

"You are Madge's dearest friend, and there is no treachery to her in trying to keep your friendship for myself," he pleads eagerly and earnestly. "I am going down to her to-morrow; let me tell her that I met you to-night, and that you sent a loving message to her."

The girl is young, and full of tender-heartedness and good feeling and gratitude to Madge for all the kindness shown a while ago, when she (Olive) needed it almost as much as she does now.

"You may say what you like that's loving to Madge," she whispers out; "and oh! Philip, do you be good to her always; do love her."

Something in the appeal goes to the very core of his heart, and selfish Philip forgets himself a moment.

"Good-bye, Olive; God bless you!" he mutters, taking off his hat in a spasm of deep respect; "think of me kindly now, for Madge's sake."

So he walks on, and leaves her out in the turmoil of the street alone. And she can't help contrasting this present carelessness of his with the chivalrous devotion of other days, when she was a rich man's reputed heiress, and Philip would have deemed himself wanting in every gentlemanly attribute if he had allowed her to walk over one yard of the pavement of Oxford Street in the glare of day unattended.

She feels very strangely softened and humbled, poor child, when she reaches the door of her lodgings. And at the door she meets Griffiths Poynter.

Griffiths Poynter, with an elderly lady leaning on his arm, and his card-case in his hand, calling on her properly—sparing her, soothing her, saving her in every social way. And she contrasts that other

one with him, and in a glow finds that other one wanting. And her fidelity to a sham yields, and her faith in her own foolhardy adherence to a failing cause yields; and her womanly willfulness in clinging to what crumbles under her touch yields; and she is almost as ready in this hour to receive Griffiths Poynter as a lover as she is to receive his aunt as her friend.

The aunt, untroubled by the presence of her daughter, is kindness and cordiality itself to the young lady of whom her nephew has discreetly made mention as Miss Roden's favorite friend. For Miss Roden is a local power in the region in which this kindly-disposed old lady hopes to see one of her daughters reigning as Griffiths' wife.

Moreover, in addition to this indisputable fact that she is acting from interested motives, Grif's aunt is kindly-hearted, and there is a forlornness about the state of this young, reduced gentlewoman which is very grievous to her. It does not occur to her unscheming, unsophisticated mind that Olive Aveland, the young person who exhibits "Barr and Battle's" jackets and mantles to the best of her ability and shoulders, will ever vault to such heights of daring, even in imagination, as to dream of being Griffiths' wife. Up to the present moment she has not been under the influence of her daughters on the subject. She has refrained from saying anything to them about this "unlucky young lady," because Grif has requested her to do so, and it has always been a habit of hers to attend to Grif's requests, partly because she really loves him very much, and partly because it is expedient.

"Miss Aveland, it's the first time I ever went into a show-room for ladies' things in my life, and to think it should have brought me the luck of meeting you again."

He says a portion of this speech with the rapidity of utterance that is the result of his earnest desire to express his pleasure in seeing her again, and the other portion of it in the disjointed tones which are the result of a rather hurried ascent of a more than rather steep flight of stairs. They are in Olive's small sitting-room by this time, and he knows his aunt is thinking how small it is, and how meagre its arrangements are. And he grieves from the bottom of his honest heart for the necessity, whatever it may be, which has brought one who ought to be in an atmosphere of perpetual "sweetness and light" down to such a drear and dingy one as this.

In that small, dull, confined space these three sit for ten minutes, and make very little headway toward gaining a fuller knowledge of each other. Then Olive, who has a hatred of standing in a false light under any circumstances, says:

"Do you think it a very terrible descent from educational serfdom to being a shop-girl, Mr. Poynter? I can see you're full of pity for me about something."

"As full of pity for you as I should be for a sister of my own," he answers promptly. Then, while Olive is looking him steadily in the face, in the endeavor to detect any sign of false shame in this pity, his well-meaning aunt interposes with one of those excellently-intentioned remarks that are very roots of bitterness to those to whom they are addressed.

"I have no doubt, Miss Aveland, but that my nephew could find you some more genteel employment—something far more congenial to you—among his own friends; housekeeper to a widower and governess to his children, or something of that sort."

"I certainly couldn't recommend anything of that sort to Miss Aveland," Grif replies, hurriedly; "and I'm quite sure she wouldn't attend to me if I did recommend it." And his face tingles with a sensation of annoyance that is a new thing to him as he feels that his aunt is "probably thinking how good the odds in favor of matrimony with the widower would be in such a case," and shyly fears that Olive may suspect his aunt of the same imaginative iniquity.

But Olive's thoughts are far otherwise employed. The impulse of hospitality is strong upon the girl, and she has not the wherewithal to obey it. She quite understands that a well-arranged dinner awaits these people at the lady's home, and still she does long to offer them the best she has, to show them to the best of her ability that they

are as welcome to her as if she could receive them properly.

The practical need of exerting herself if she is really to do anything at all in the way of obeying her instinct, drives all the romance of that last meeting with the Philip who had been hers and is Madge's out of her mind. She is nervous, but nervous only with household care, as she presently petitions them, in a voice that proves she means it, to "stay and have some tea with her."

Grif is delighted. He would gladly stay and have a cup of hot water and a grain of salt, so long as the partaking of it procured him her presence.

And his aunt accepts the invitation with a beneficence and winning condescension that is quite lost upon the young people, that one of whom busily employs herself in preparing the refreshment she had proffered, while the other busies himself equally in watching her evolutions.

There is something poetical about that tea making, practical Griffiths thinks. The girl has got her lodgings in the house of an old countrywoman who had been cook for many years in a great county family. And during her sojourn among them she had been given many a quaint old piece of china, and many a maimed and mutilated piece of silver. By these the young lady on her first floor benefitted now. Therefore there was nothing incongruous between the girl and the articles with which she served her guests.

As she lights the gas at length, and the full light streams down on her head, he sees twisted into the crown of lustrous hair a ribbon of the rich amber hue she had been dressed in the first time he saw her. A similar ribbon encircles her neck, for though black silk dresses are the rule of Barr and Battle's establishment, Olive clings to her favorite color, and wears it where she may.

He remembers how Madge had told him that the "Amber Witch" was the pet phrase whereby she and some other intimate friends were wont to designate Olive. Remembering this, he worries himself by wondering who the other intimate friends were, and hopes heartily that there was no man among them. And so gradually gets silent and sad, and suffers his tea to get cold, and the spirit of the meeting to fail and die away.

"We must be very late, my dear Grif, and I'm sure Miss Aveland must be quite tired of us," his aunt says, vainly trying to suppress her fourth yawn, and inwardly rather aggrieved by the fact that Olive should seem to be sympathetic to Grif's silence and sadness, to the degree of indulging the same herself.

"Late—it can't be late!" Grif says, rising up, nevertheless. Then he looks at his aunt so inquiringly that that lady is utterly bewildered by her mental efforts to try and make out what Grif can possibly mean.

"We have had a most delightful evening," she stammers out to Olive; "so quiet and friendly, you know."

"And, though it's rather late for a call, you must please to take it for one," Grif hurriedly interposes. "My aunt's address is—(by-the-way, have you a card with you? that's the safest way)." And again Grif looks appealingly at his aunt.

"No, I haven't a card," she replies, stringing her soul up to the awful thought of hurting Grif, reminding herself of her daughter's wrath should a shop-girl dare to come and call on them. Why don't Grif think of this? Why will he put her in such a cleft stick? Why, when he knew how very fastidious his cousins were, should he make her run counter to that fastidiousness, and then disarrange her plans for keeping her conduct secret.

All these thoughts pass through her mind as she stands trying to get her cloak adjusted, and trembling so that she cannot button it. As she is really a good and kind-hearted woman, she would go considerably out of her way to do good in any degree to this desolate girl whom she can see is a gentlewoman. She would willingly go out of her own way, but she dare not go into the way of her daughters.

Griffiths all the time thinks this reticence is simply amiable obtuseness on the part of his aunt. Therefore, though he would much rather that that lady's name and address should be courteously handed by herself to Olive, he waives that point, writes it down, and, as he gives it to Miss Aveland, says:

"You have started an at home day, haven't you, aunt? Bedford Street is too far for Miss Aveland to go and find you out."

Before Mrs. Wainwright can answer Olive has understood the situation, accepted it, and resolved to escape from it in a way that shall not embarrass the poor bewildered lady, whose eyes have beamed kindness only upon her (Olive).

"It is impossible that I can come," she says, very gently; "though it is just as kind of you to wish it; but I am tied tightly down to my work all day, and when I leave it I want rest."

She says it so unsuspiciously, she gives her hand so cordially to Mrs. Wainwright, that she has no idea that the fears, which even she admits to be unworthy, have been detected and assuaged by Olive, who, having performed her part with the lady, turns to close the scene with Griffiths.

"I shall not see you again probably, Mr. Poynter, so I will give you a message for Madge now. Tell her where I am, and that I am well, and that I hope all the rest of her life will be happier even than her bright past, and give her my dearest love."

"I'll do all that," he says, with some emotion; "but you must not cut me off like this; if you have no time to go out by day, and no inclination to go out in the evening, my consins are not situated so; they'll come with me to see you and have tea like we have to-night; do let us. Won't they, aunt?"

Emaciated as she has been for some time past by misery, by suspense, by injustice and insult, Olive wakes at this into something of her old self, and laughs, actually laughs cheerfully.

"Good-night," she says, as Mrs. Wainwright, speechless from the moment of her nephew's last observation, slides out of the room. "Good-night; never make plans for other people; it's interfering with the liberty of the subject, and I don't approve of that."

"But I may see you again?"

"No," she says, impatiently. "I am peculiarly situated, and—but I needn't explain; good-bye."

"I may write?" he pleads.

She hesitates, then says:

"Write to me when Madge marries."

He has to be content with this concession, for his aunt is crying aloud from midway down the stairs, that "it is quite dangerous to leave a place like this without a light." So with rather an effusive "I will," he goes, and Olive is alone again.

Alone again, with better, truer thoughts in her mind than filled it before these people came. In their acknowledgement of her, in their trust in her, in the friendship he had displayed so ardently, and that which his aunt had displayed to the limited extent of her own daring, Olive derived comfort and found balm for her poor, bruised spirit.

"He's worlds too good—he's too much of a man for any woman to make a vengeance dummy of him," she thinks, as she takes dozens of Philip's letters from a corner of her desk, and proceeds resolutely to tear each sheet into four pieces before putting them into the fire. "I hope he will never tempt me to marry him; and if he does, I pray that I may have the courage to tell him about Philip."

With a calmer spirit than has been her portion since the date of her ignominious dismissal from Mrs. Wilmot's house, with a freer heart than has rested in her bosom since Philip turned traitor, with a feeling of having a portion at least of her womanly dignity restored to her, Olive goes to bed this night.

And as she quietly sleeps, with every revengeful thought exorcised, every unworthy ambition cast away, Griffiths Poynter is employed upon the composition of a letter which he means to post the instant he has finished it, in which he urges her, by every consideration that love can conjure up, to be his wife.

CHAPTER XXI.

"AT LAST."

MADGE, turning her head round on the pillow, with the sensations of one who wakes from a dreamless sleep that has been too deep to be refreshing, catches sight of a brightly-burning fire, and rises on her elbow at once in her astonishment at a phenomenon which had not been there when last she went to bed in Moorbridge House.

The attitude (which by a vast effort she sustains for about half a minute) affords her a sight of more wonders that are strange to her. Somebody's ancestors are gazing at her from various panels. All the furniture of the room, which has been grand, is now only gloomy, and large snow-flakes are floating airily past the window.

She has no recollection whatever of the last ride she rode, and the last roof that sheltered her in these earlier moments of her restoration to reason and convalescence. All her dangers, all her anxieties, all her follies are blotted from her mind, which is like a sheet of white paper ready to receive the faintest impression that may be made upon it. The first impressions that are made have been described—they are tangible. The second is a dreamy doubt as to whether she is in a lunatic asylum or not. The third is that somebody she knows—two somebodies she knows are coming toward her as she falls back, falling hollow and very liable to crack and crumble away, upon the pillow.

As these two somebodies come nearer, and even lean over the bed, stronger recollections come trooping into the mind that has been lying fallow for so long a time, and "fond memory" recalls to her the fact that she frivolously opposed herself to the gentle judgment of one of these watchers, on the occasion of her being last awake. A twinge of conscience renders her an easy prey to weakness again, and she has no strength to put her hand responsively into that loving one of Mrs. Henderson's which is placed on her wrist.

"Gone off again!" Aunt Lucy suggests, in a penetrating whisper that always becomes hissing distinct when she is greatly agitated. And at this despondent view of her case Madge does rouse herself to open her eyes, and smile with them, though the weary corners of her mouth can not follow their example, and say:

"No, I'm not, auntie dear."

It is the first time she has spoken to them; it is the first time she has looked at them with knowledge for a weary month, and in their joy and gladness they would both heartily like to cry and call for Philip, who has been most becomingly miserable during the whole term of Madge's illness. But they have already decided between themselves that "Madge must not be fluttered by the sight of Philip until the doctor says she may be so fluttered;" which is, on the whole, a sagacious decision, since Philip is not one of the facts that fond Memory has recalled to her vividly as yet.

But, in the course of a short time, he and other persons and things come back to her, and she learns where she is, and hears how she came here; and remembers everything! remembers even the sound of the flutter behind her which overweighed and upset the balance of her mind. With a shudder she turns away from that remembrance, and asks:

"Where is Philip? how is he?"

"Quite near, and very anxious," Mrs. Henderson says, concisely.

"Intensely anxious," Aunt Lucy adds; "the blow it was to him that morning when his cousin came."

"What morning?" Madge asks quickly.

"The morning Phil brought the tidings of your illness to us at Moorbridge," Mrs. Henderson says, taking the subject into her own hands with what she fears Aunt Lucy will think uncourteous haste. But her dread that Aunt Lucy, in the innocence of her heart, will say something about Phil that had better be left unsaid in Madge's weak state, overmasters her sense of courtesy. For she knows Madge better than the other, knows that the girl will hate and reproach herself keenly by-and-by, if her weakness permits a thought that should be checked, a hope that should be killed.

So Mrs. Henderson goes on briskly to tell Madge that Philip her lover is, and has been all the time, waiting for her recovery, at the wretched shanty in the village which they call an inn. And Madge, who does not think so much of that part of his devotion (women always bear the thought of bodily discomfort better than men), is touched to tears when they tell her how ill, how subdued, how unlike himself in manner he has been the whole time.

"He is fond of her, then, really fond of her;

deserving of all the love and confidence she has in her to bestow," she feels, as the tears drip down on the pillow and make the cheek which presses it very damp and uncomfortable. Fond enough of her to have become depressed and unlike in manner that debonair Philip who asked for her hand and heart before she realized (though she had theorized about it) what it would mean to her did she make him these gifts.

She realizes what it will be now in this hour when she is recovering from the fever. Realizes freely all that she owes to him. More than this, she realizes freely all that she owes to herself, to her own promise, and resolves to pay the debt, howsoever heavy a one it may prove.

"And his cousin? where is his cousin?" she interrogates very tranquilly, presently.

"He went home the same day, and we have not heard from him since," with that sort of suppressed, embarrassed feeling which revenges itself for its suppression by making itself manifest in an elaborate calm, which is to be detected as spurious instantly.

"Poor fellow!" Madge observes, laconically, and again for a few moments the original quietude resumes its sway in the sick-room.

But Aunt Lucy, who has been utterly hopeless for a month, and only partially hopeful since Madge began to show signs of restitution to herself—Aunt Lucy, who is hysterically grateful for the tiniest sign of interest in anything mundane that the girl she looked upon as moribund can show, fans what she looks upon as a feeble earthly flicker after the lapse of a few moments, and says gently:

"Why do you say 'poor fellow,' dear Madge? he didn't seem to be at all the worse for the long ride and exposure to weather that was enough to lay a horse up."

Madge's face is suffused in an instant with a gleam of satisfaction that is more like a sunbeam than a smile. From the cursory mention made of Phil by Mrs. Henderson, she feared that he was paying some such penalty for their joint imprudence as she had paid. The relief of finding from her aunt's words that such is not the case is infinite, and Madge won't repent of her pitiful ejaculation, even though her own Philip has been loyally suffering many disagreeables for her sake at the village in the last month.

She strengthens hourly now, and begins to take an interest in crisply narrated details of the every day life in this mansion on the moor. She even asks to see Mrs. Graves, and, when that weird old lady stands before her, the wan, wasted girl raises herself and thanks her in words that seem to glow, for the "countenance, the shelter, she gave on that awful night."

Madge is hardly conscious herself of the fervor she throws into her thanks. Her own friends believe it is the enthusiasm and emotional feeling which are the offsprings often of fever and weakness. But her shrewd old new acquaintance remembers the days of her own youth to some purpose, and is quite sure that Miss Roden is grateful for something beyond being saved from the cold blasts of Exmoor and the scanty comforts of the village inn. Compassionately she feels certain that the girl is grateful to the circumstances which intervened and saved her from being led into the temptation of learning to love the cousin of her lover.

Brisk breezes have been blowing over Exmoor for several days. For several days Madge has been aware of and eager to meet their beneficial influences. She has loved to have the window opened wide, and the curtains pulled back. She has exerted herself to lean forward and listen to the voice of Nature, that sounds with such thrilling clearness up in the rarified atmosphere of these solitudes. The river that rushes through the hamlet and past the Manor House is a bubbling, bouldery, noisy one, and in its course past her bedroom it tells many a tale, and sings many a song in a loud strain to Madge. Sometimes the moor-bred girl almost shrieks out her delight at the sight of the wild fowl that go wafting by to some inland haunt. Her bright, keen eyes watch, with the same joy she felt when a child, for a stray heron or a circling hawk. There is a rookery in the Manor House grounds, and every evening the spectacle is a fresh

pleasure to her of the rooks darkening the sky in a compact mass as they fly home. She sits, propped up with pillows, to hear her mare Brunette led past her window at a walk first, then a trot, then a gallop. And radiantly she acknowledges that "Brunette's legs must be all right." In fact, she has, despite this long and trying illness, the morning bloom of life and joy in life about her still. She is young, and fresh and happy, and pure enough still, to go on taking interest and pleasure in unimportant things and things that in themselves are not either pleasurable, beautiful or interesting. But with all this keen appreciation, with all this fervent sympathy, with all this unabated interest in everything that has life and motion, there is something wanting.

She has never once expressed a desire, much less a longing, to see the man she is going to marry.

She has not been unmindful of him; on the contrary, she has been thoughtful for him; sending him reassuring messages as to the state of her health, and urgent requests that he would try and amuse himself by snipe-shooting or going out with the stag-hounds. And he has obeyed her, and had some very successful nights on the moor with the wild fowl, and days on the moor after the red deer. He has brought home vivid reports of his exploits, and Mrs. Henderson has carefully retailed them in a way that has often roused Madge to animation, and admiration of his skill, or prowess, or courage, as these qualities may have been respectively called into play. But though she has been sending him honeyed words of encouragement to go out and pursue these mimic wars, and to come home and send her terse accounts of them, she has never sighed for, never asked for, a sight of the hero.

Old Miss Roden, whose experience of betrothed lovers, under such circumstances, has been of a limited order, ascribes this reserve to the most divinely maidenly delicacy. Mrs. Henderson knows better, and aches within herself for Madge's sake for doing so. Philip himself having asked two or three times with well-portrayed ardor, if "Madge didn't want to see him," and having been put off each time in a lame and impotent way, resigned himself (as well as he could, knowing, as he did, that those around were noticing it) to the facts.

Therefore, he is surprised this day, when, just as he is about to mount his horse and ride to a meet, a couple of miles off, Mrs. Henderson hastens up to him, and says:

"Philip, will you come and see Madge; she wishes for you?"

"At last!" he says; and he can't help saying it with a half-smile and an expression playing about his face that is not that of a pleased and happy lover.

Rather slowly (according to Mrs. Henderson's way of thinking) he lifts his leg out of the saddle again, and prepares to follow her. The whole thing strikes him as inopportune. The day had promised well. He had secured a mount more entirely to his satisfaction than any it had been his luck to get since he had been hunting down here. The hounds were celebrated; the day was fine; the field, it had been announced, would be an exceptionally full one. And he had to give up all these things because it was a girl's whim that she "wished to see him" at this exact time, when she had so contentedly gone without seeing him for ever so long.

"Remember how ill she has been," Mrs. Henderson says, warningly, as she pauses for a moment at the door. As he nods his head in response, she opens it, and he sees Madge once more with all relations unchanged between them.

She is sitting in a square, high-backed chair, wrapped up closely in a silver-gray dressing-gown that is bordered and brightened with rose pink. Her eyes are bright, her mouth firm and smiling, her complexion clear and warm. She is one of the women who, by reason of their intense vitality always look better in health than they actually are. It almost disappoints the man, who has been lodging at an inconvenience to himself for more than a month for her sake, that she should look so little like an invalid. He does not see the effort she makes to look bright and move easily. He does not feel the tension of her nerves while she constrains herself to seem "very much better," in order not to distress him. He appreciates neither

her resolution nor her affectionate subtlety; for he does not understand them.

The room, an ante-room to that dark chamber wherein poor Madge had been lying ill so long, has been carefully put at its best by Mrs. Henderson, under Madge's orders. It was Madge who had begged that hyacinths and tulips might be sent for and spotted about in hastily improvised jardinières at every turn. It was Madge who had declared for a chair instead of a couch, in order that he might think her strong. And Mrs. Henderson, knowing all these things, unjustly hates Philip when she sees how quietly he believes all he is, and how little grateful he is for the self-abnegation of Madge, of which he knows nothing.

Madge will rise up as he nears her, and when he is encircling her with his arms, he repeats his own words, "At last," in a most effective manner, a manner that differs widely from the one in which he last uttered them (has he not avowed a love for and proficiency in amateur dramatics?)

"Dear Philip, I sent for you the instant I could—the instant I came in here; I knew you'd like it," Madge says, not at all in the tone of one who offers an explanation, but rather in that of one who mentions a most gratifying fact.

"And I came the instant you sent for me; still the time has been long enough since we met before to justify me in saying 'at last?'" he questions, quietly. And a sense of disappointment and disapprobation of self steals over Madge. She has evidently failed in rendering something that she ought to render to him.

She subsides back into her chair and puts her hand on the sleeve of his short riding-coat.

"You were going hunting to-day, Philip?"

If she had said, "You are going hunting to-day," Philip would have offered to forego that on which his heart had been set for the last three days. But as she said, "You were going," he girded against the implication.

"I was, certainly, and I scarcely thought that, as you have done so well without me all along, you would command my society for more than half an hour to-day, dear."

He tries to say this playfully, but Madge understands him very well, and knows that her let will be a hard one with this man, whether he loves her, or whether he does not.

"I am glad you're going," she says quickly, but all gladness is gone from her heart, poor child. "I am glad you're going, Philip, for the day is so fine, and a burst over the moor does everyone good, I think. And I tell you what" (she draws nearer to him as she says this, and snuggles her hand more closely into his—he has been holding hers all the while)—"and I tell you what. Brunette knows the work so well, and would carry you splendidly, and—I wish you would ride Brunette, Philip; she's my pet horse."

"I was just getting on her when Mrs. Henderson came and told me you wished to see me," he says, quite coolly; and Madge, as she lies back with a beating heart and a face that is flushed scarlet, is told by Mrs. Henderson that she really must not excite herself any more to-day—she really must let Philip go. So Philip kisses her and goes off on Brunette gladly enough, and for the remainder of the day Madge is strangely silent. "Will he always take everything for granted," she wonders; and "if he had loved her, would he have treated her own horse as his own property before she had asked him to do so?"

With these doubts in her mind she has to bear the inspection of two pairs of anxious eyes all day, and it is the longest and most miserable one for illness.

CHAPTER XXII.

POOR BRUNETTE!

"Woe worth the chase, woe worth the day."

HANGMAN'S HILL scowls in front of him, a barrier of gloom to the good stag who has run for his life five-and-thirty miles already this day. The ascent begins to be more abrupt, and only a few stragglers remain of the fine field that started in the morning. The rest have "fainted, and faltered, and homeward gone," long before Hangman's Hill is gained.

Foremost among these stragglers, well up with

the master of the hounds himself, is Philip. Brunette has proved her knowledge of the country satisfactorily. She has been in a good place all day, and still she is going easily.

Philip Fletcher is a skillful and daring, rather than a merciful and sparing rider. But the evidence this day is certainly in favor of his having ridden Brunette with kindness and discretion, for the bonny brown mare is unpunished still.

Suddenly, in front of them, rises one of the regular moor-land stone fences, at a short distance from them still, but starting sharply out of the ground, as objects do start out in this light. Philip feels that more than one horse will refuse it, that more than one will fall, but Brunette will not falter.

Nevertheless, in spite of this faith in her pluck and her prowess, he mistakes a certain cautiousness, with which she approaches it, for unwillingness. Her apparent hesitation develops his spirit of impatience, and he deals her a blow as he digs his spurs into her heaving sides with a force that makes her bound in her stride and fly the fences well in advance of the others.

As soon as she is over, instead of continuing the ascent in the direction he knows the stag and hounds are going, she turns to a downward incline at a pace which he speedily realizes he has no power to control. He gives her one long, steady pull, and she flies along the faster; and then the mare has a second and fiercer edition of Philip's practical ideas as to justifiable punishment.

He has no fear for himself. With all his faults, the man is an accomplished rider; and so, with a certain pleasant conviction that the "wayward beast will get the worst of it," he deals her a blow well between the ears, and digs his spurs into the sides that Madge's rosy, loving face has been laid against caressingly dozens of times. And he knows this. He cares little enough for her terrific pace. She has spoiled his fun by her burst, and now she shall go on for his pleasure. So she goes on till she seems to kick the moor behind her, and drops suddenly into one of those wooded roads, which often rise and stagger one on the borders of the barren waste. And now he tries to turn her in her stride, but she goes straight, and he repents him of his severity a little when her head comes into furious collision with a tree, and Brunette drops down dead under him.

No thought of the sorrow for her horse that will be Madge's portion adds poignancy to the pain he feels at being left here in some humanity-abandoned spot where he has no landmarks. His brandy-flask is empty. Sandwiches, that have been made for more than half an hour, he always looks upon as masses of corruption; therefore, as soon as he recollects the case he carries, he shudders away from the recollection. He does not possess that exhaustive capacity for cursing which characterized the one who wrote:

"Whether he's out, or whether he's in,
To me it matters not a pin;
Be every curse of every sin
On Maurice Darcy, Knight of Gwynne."

But though he does not possess it in the like degree, there is a good deal of force and power in the curses he calls down upon those men of North Devon and Somerset who have gone on and left him in the wilds with no other companion than a carcass of a dead horse.

His only guides out of this difficulty are his natural intelligence and his knowledge of the position Hangman's Hill occupies with regard to another beacon, which has a position he will recognize (if he ever gains it) with regard to a hill on the Somerset boundary-line. Once there, he will be in a region he knows. So he strikes out bravely enough in the direction he believes to be the right one, without a single sad, back thought of dead Brunette, beyond the natural regret anyone must feel at the destruction of a good horse.

He must be left to follow his path over the weird moor-land, through the rapidly darkening night, alone. Another claims us for awhile.

"It is hard lines for a fellow, after being coaxed down against his will, to be kicked out in this way," Phil Fletcher soliloquizes, as, after that final renunciation of every wish he had respecting

Madge, which he had offered as a voluntary sacrifice, he mounts the top of the four-horse coach which is to convey him back to the realms of railways. He feels very much as if Philip, his cousin, were a dishonest reproduction of Esau—feels as if he had been defrauded of his birthright, and given not even a mess of pottage in exchange.

Mrs. Henderson's last words of advice ring in his ears, as the horses take a perilous descent at full gallop, and the coach swerves from side to side, like a rolling steamer in a storm. "Go and work, and forget her, boy."

It is so easy to give advice, he reflects, and so uncommonly hard to act upon it. There is no chance of his "forgetting her" in the work he is doing now. That has become too purely mechanical, in spite of its being the keeping of accounts, the disarrangement of which would ruin a mighty house. Still, though it exercises his calculating, it does not exercise his intellectual qualities, and poor Phil knows that there will be no "nepenthe" for the memory of his lost Madge in it.

The way out of the western counties is a weary one when one is longing to be in town. And though Phil is not actually longing to be in town, he is longing to be on the highroad to some new and absorbing occupation.

There is no welcome pre-arranged for him in the little house in Chelsea, for the simple reason that his coming is unexpected. But he has a very hearty, spontaneous one from Chrissy and Mabel, and a very softly, tender one from his mother, whose wistful eyes detect in a moment that there is something amiss with her boy.

She delights in hearing details concerning Mrs. Henderson, whom she can only remember as a bright, bewitching, if not, strictly speaking, beautiful girl. She delights in hearing details concerning Mrs. Henderson's husband, and house, and daughters, and duties. But, to her son's surprise, she is unaffectedly unconcerned about Madge.

"If she makes Philip a good wife, he will make her a good husband," she says at last, when Phil rather awkwardly introduces her into the conversation; "but I fear, poor boy, that he has bowed his pride to his heart in the matter, and that she will make him suffer in both."

In his amazement, in his wrath, in his savage bewilderment at Madge being so misplaced in anyone's estimation, much more in the estimation of one whom he loves and esteems as he does his mother, he burst out with a truth:

"She is a thousand times too good for him—I've never known him to do any good yet in his life, but he never did anything half so bad as this before."

"As what, Phil, dear?" his mother asks in the soothing tones in which one addresses an incipient lunatic.

"As his engaging himself to Mad—Miss Roden; she's not to be spoken of in the same day with Philip; you'll adore her, mum, dear."

"As you do already," his mother thinks, pityingly. But she says nothing. Only this unspoken sorrow of her boy's sits heavy on her heart, and her subdued manner soon calls them all into active service about her, endeavoring to assuage what they believe to be some additional bodily suffering. But bodily suffering she bears without wincing. This dread that her "boys" may learn to do less than love one another is harder to bear.

When she goes to bed this night Mabel and Chrissy turn to him with more questions concerning Madge.

"Is she a regular innocent country girl, or will she crush us with fine-lady airs when she marries Philip? Somehow, though he has said very little about her, he has given us the impression that the less she sees of us, his poor relations, the better she'll be pleased."

"Confound him for his lying impressions!" Phil blurts out in a rage. "I beg your pardon, girls; but the whole thing is a hideous nightmare to me, and I'm afraid if I throw it off that the reality will be worse."

All this is very mysterious to Mabel and Chrissy, as it would be to everyone else who didn't chance to be in the secret of his feelings respecting Madge independently of his cousin. And he knows that it must seem to them like the "blood and death" at a penny show—a mockery and a sham.

Wisely they refrain from saying anything more on that subject, and presently, in order to give them something fresh to think about, he says:

"I'm sick of that office work. I wish I could get something that would give me more to do and to think about."

"A certainty is always nice," Chrissy says reflectively.

"But Phil could afford to do something more congenial now," Mabel says, sympathetically; and this sympathy, though it does not make him more dissatisfied with his present position, emboldens him to talk about altering it more openly.

He dismisses the subject until late that night, and the end of it is that he is made to understand that his sisters won't think him a reckless wretch even if he does "throw up the certainty and try for something else that will give him more to do and to think about"—that may perchance turn out to be the work that may enable him to forget Madge!

But before Phil can take any definite step himself toward altering the pattern of his life, chance kindly steps in as he is wont to do, and spares Phil the responsibility.

In worthy imitation of some of the nobles of the land, a member of Parliament and great county magnate, desiring to make his second son a partner in a great house of trade, comes to the very house in which Phil is employed—and Phil, as representative of the house on several occasions, is thrown much into the society of the lad, who takes a lad's liking for him.

Before the negotiation is completed, Death intervenes and carries off Mr. Westcott, the father. And then false pride in the mother's heart breaks it off altogether, and Ronald Westcott is "saved from the degradation of a desk," as his mother terms it, and given unlimited time to "choose a profession."

Finally it arranges itself in this way. The lad bargains only for one thing, and submits himself to his mother's judgment in all others. "If you can get that jolly fellow Fletcher for my tutor, I'll do as you like," he tells his mother. So Phil is offered a stipend that makes his renunciation of the certainty a very minor matter, and he accepts it and the situation, after very brief deliberation.

Ronald, a handsome, thin, lithe, tawny-haired boy, with the beauty and grace and breeding of a greyhound, is only eighteen, but already Mrs. Westcott believes him to be the object of any number of matrimonial designs. And so, when an invitation arrives for him to spend the last weeks of the year at his uncle's house, in what his mother calls the "wilds of the country," she commands that Phil goes with him to guard him against some cousinly snares which she suspects.

"My brother-in-law, Mr. Francis Westcott, is a very good sort of man," she explains to Phil, "but his wife is a person of whom I never approved; her father was the apothecary who attended the servants of the family when the Westcotts were in the country. I acknowledged her when she married, but we have never been intimate."

Phil accepts this information with a careless, amiable indifference that irritates the lady who offers it. But "Ronald is so absurdly fond of him" she remembers, and she wants his restraining influence over Ronald.

"The girls are pretty, but it is beauty of an order that stamps them as under-bred at once; they are large and fair and fat by this time, I should think; then, again, they're so loud and boisterous and overpowering in their manner, and if one of them trapped Ronald I should never get over it—never! I want you to promise to see that nothing of that sort happens."

"You had better let him alone, and he won't think of marriage for the next ten years; if a word of warning is said to him, of course he will propose to one of his cousins at once," Phil suggested.

"But you will go with him?"

As he has been engaged for the express purpose, Phil thinks this question an idle one. Nevertheless he assents to it.

"Then I rely upon you," Mrs. Westcott tells him, with a fervent pressure of the hand, that Phil is quite conscious he does not deserve.

"And you will meet him at Paddington by the half-past eleven train on Saturday?—I shouldn't

feel happy for him to arrive at Delabourn without you?"

"Certainly I will; may I ask in what direction we go?" Phil laughs; "when I asked Ronald just now, he said, 'Oh! on the borders of what's his name,' which was vague."

"It's somewhere in Somerset or Devonshire," Mrs. Westcott says. Then she adds, scornfully, "Not a family place, understand; merely rented by Francis Westcott, because he likes the scenery about Exmoor."

"Oh!" Phil rejoins as he takes a hasty leave; and he spends the rest of that day in trying to determine whether Exmoor is a sufficiently wide tract to justify him in approaching one of its borders again. Or whether his promise to Mrs. Henderson—his vow to himself—does not demand that he should throw up this appointment, and leave Ronald to his own devices?

Ultimately he comes to the conclusion that it is a sufficiently wide tract to justify him in going. And so Mrs. Westcott's plans are not deranged.

They have been at Delabourn a week. They have gained the freedom, so to say, of the freest house in the world. In all respects, Phil finds himself treated like one of the family by them all. The master and mistress of Delabourn are a happy, hearty couple, who are quite on good terms with the world that looked upon theirs as a misalliance; quite on good terms with it, and quite contented that it should think what it pleases of them and theirs. The two daughters are, as Mrs. Westcott insinuated, fat, fair, large, handsome girls, full of spirits and chaff, which they have learned from their two brothers, one of whom is an Eton boy, the other an Oxford man. Phil lets himself like these girls very much, for they are so utterly unlike Madge in their hoydenish thoughtlessness, that there is no disloyalty to his love for her in his doing so. He feels quite safe with them, both on his own account and on his pupil's. They will never either try to trap Ronald, nor will they misunderstand him (Phil). They call him by his Christian name, and request him to "just go and get them," whatever they happen to want, as readily as if they had known him all their lives. In fact, they regard and disregard him, very much in the same way they do their own elder brother.

Delabourn, though it has not the honor of being a "family place" of the Westcott's, is a fine specimen of an English home. A good granite house, grown the color of a Danish crow, standing in a hollow flat, almost surrounded by a belt of trees, with a grand view of Exmoor through the opening where the belt gapes. The air is pure, bright, fresh, invigorating, and still they are sheltered from the rasping moor winds. If Phil could only cease from wondering perpetually in which direction Halsworthy and Moorbridge House may be, this bracing air in which he finds rest would do him good. But he does not know, and he dares not ask, and the puzzling over the problem in private neutralizes the good effects of the change.

The life they lead here is a primitive one. They dine early, and have ponderous suppers, which, somehow or other, do not give them nightmares. In the matter of digestion, indeed, "the strength of each individual young Westcott is as the strength of ten." It may be because their hearts are pure, or it may be because they take very violent exercise after their latest meal.

They have a carpet-dance nearly every evening, for their house is always full of guests; and one night, when Phil is plunging round in the *trois temps* with the handsomest and heaviest Miss Westcott, there comes a sharp pull at the porter's bell, and the next minute a strange gentleman, who has lost his way hunting on the moor, is introduced into the midst of the most hospitable family in the world.

They are all about and around him as Phil and his partner pull up, and with a savage wish in his heart that he "had never heard of the Westcotts," Phil recognizes his cousin—Madge's lover.

CHAPTER XXIII.

GRIF'S TROUBLE.

"'Tis only being in love or debt, that robs us of our rest."

AFTER the receipt of that letter from Griffiths Poynter, Olive is happier even than she was on the

previous night after her visitor's departure: happier and more decided as to her own course of conduct.

She is only a woman, and, cruel as it may seem, it is the truth—she is much happier for the knowledge that Grif wants to marry her, though she is quite resolved never to marry him. She is much happier for this proof that he is ready to play the part of King Cophetua, though she has lapsed into a position which, in her estimation, is lower than that of the beggar maid's.

She answers his letter in a flush of grateful enthusiasm, giving him her negative as gently as she can, but making it a clear negative, for all its gentleness. She tries to play the part of guide, philosopher and friend to him, counseling him, with no affectation of humility, but with a good amount of common sense, to seek a wife in his sphere. "I know what I am, and you know what I am"—she writes these words with a pardonable glow of pride—"but your cousin would never forget the fact of having seen me at 'Barr and Battle's,' even if I loved you well enough to marry you. But you deserve better love than mine, and I feel this to be the case—luckily for you." And then she went on to tell him something of that cloud which Philip Fletcher had cast over her life.

As soon as she has time to think soberly after dispatching this letter, she recalls this confidence of hers, and thinks how supremely foolish she has been to make it. "What could have induced me to wear my heart on my sleeve in such an idiotic manner," she asks herself, in the futile way in which we all of us at some time or other of our lives have to repent of similar idiocy; "because a man has wanted to marry me, why must I go and tell him that I have wanted to marry somebody else. I shall not be happy now till I see Mr. Poynter, and find out whether he suspects who that somebody else was or not."

Perhaps there might have been a taint of original sin in this desire for further communion with one whom she had desired to think no further about her. Perhaps there might have been a spice of coquetry in the wish to see Grif again. But more probably it was the human longing for companionship of its own order; and Grif's is the only companionship of that kind that she knows will be accorded to her gladly, eagerly, now that she has been forced to take office that she feels to be one continual degradation to her.

Griffiths at home in his aunt's house in Bedford Street, riding at anchor on the bosom of that family harbor, which is land-locked, so to say, by seven cousins, receives his letter of rejection by the five o'clock post, just as they are regaling him with afternoon tea.

The Misses Wainwright rather pride themselves on their afternoon tea arrangements. They have it out of a picnic set, in which Rose-de-Barri, turquoise, blue, green, and clear yellow hues run riot in what they believe to be a conscientious imitation of old Sevres. When they get Grif on a low, fat chair in front of a big fire, with one of those cups and saucers in his hand, they feel as if they had him at their mercy, and might marry him without delay. He is always more affectionate to them at this hour; not with any design of raising false hopes in their expansive hearts, but because he feels that he is a miserable imposter for joining in this tea orgie at all, and that they deserve some compensation for the wretched deception he is practicing on them by professing to like it.

A wafer of bread-and-butter that melts in his mouth and nearly makes him sick, has just been handed to him by one sister, and the most precious cup of all the set has been given into his unappreciative hand, when the postman's knock causes his heart to quail, and his naturally florid face to turn as nearly white as it is possible for it to turn. He knows that Olive will answer him at once, and he feels that if he misses two such girls as Madge and Olive—why he will never try a third, that is all.

A trim parlor-maid brings him in a letter on a salver, and his nails rattle against its plated surface as he picks the letter up. For a long, long time, Grif will never see a salver without hearing that rattle, and recalling the nervous sensations which caused it.

He reads it; and as he reads, something in his face convinces his cousins that it is "from a

woman," and they hoist family danger-signals to one another; for it is as if they were entering a tunnel. All is in darkness around them! To the best of their knowledge, Grif never in his life had a letter from any other woman than one of themselves before.

One of them (the same one whose shoulders were being mantled that day in "Barr and Battle's" show-room, when he met Olive for the first time in town), whose hopes are highest respecting Grif just now, because he has amiably suffered himself to be dragged round shopping with her, is the first to speak. She says, as carelessly as she can:

"Any news from the country, Grif?"

"It's from a friend in town," he says, briefly, and goes on reading it.

More danger-signals are hoisted; and one of the sisters says:

"Do you know when Miss Roden is coming to town?"

He shakes his head.

"I suppose she will come up before her marriage?"

"I hope she will," Grif says, heartily, for he is thinking that he will get Madge to intercede for him with Olive, and as yet, of course, he knows nothing of Madge's illness.

Silence glooms over the party after this, and at last the seven Miss Wainwrights rise, and say they "may as well go in and dress for dinner." Grif casts a palpably appealing glance at his aunt. It says, as plainly as possible, "Stay;" and some of her daughters see it, and suspect at once "that mamma knows something which she has not told them concerning this woman unknown and Grif."

Mrs. Wainwright, who has risen with her daughters, falters under that glance, and falls away back into her chair, with a vague statement to the effect that she "can't bear to move from the fire." She is intensely miserable, for she has a presentiment that Grif is about to repose some honorable confidence in her, which will prove a white elephant, not to say a bitter burden. But she can't help herself; so she stays, and meekly prepares to receive it.

The instant her daughters are out of the room, her presentiment is realized.

"Aunt," Grif begins, "you won't be very much surprised to hear that I made Miss Aveland an offer this morning?"

In this supreme moment, Mrs. Wainwright sees all the hopes her sanguine daughters have been entertaining for years crumble at her feet, and the dust of their ruins nearly chokes her. She can't speak—she can only gasp.

With the selfishness that a sorrow of this kind is almost sure to engender, Grif sees nothing of her emotion. He is thinking only of Olive. Not that his thoughts of Olive are selfish, for what good is it worrying himself about that sorrow of hers to which she has alluded in her letter, "which can never be blunted and never be healed," she says.

"And this is her answer," he goes on, tapping Olive's letter; and at that, Mrs. Wainwright's choked utterance frees itself.

"Oh! Grif," she says, brokenly; "to think you should have been led away by a girl like that; I'm sure if I'd suspected anything of this sort, nothing would have induced me to put my foot inside her door."

His mind is too full of his trouble for him to take in the full meaning of the reproof, but he does understand enough of it to say:

"What on earth are you talking about?"

"Why, about this young person," Mrs. Wainwright answers, lashing herself up into the display of a pretense of spirit by the thought of her daughters' feelings and sayings on the subject when they hear of it. "Why, about this young person; there must be something wrong; no respectable girl of good family would be suffered by her friends to be in such a position; and to think she would have trapped you."

Grif is very tolerant to every form of womanly weakness. So now he only leans forward and clasps his aunt's hand, and says:

"Don't say any more, aunt dear; she has refused me."

Mrs. Wainwright disbelieved in many of the

modern articles of social faith. She disbelieved in the education of the masses—in the milk of the metropolis—in co-operative stores—and lady doctors. But in none of these things did she disbelieve half so heartily as in the possibility of any woman who was free refusing to marry her nephew, Griffiths Poynter, the head of the house.

"Then, depend upon it, she has a husband living, and is afraid of being had up for bigamy," she says, with such an air of grave conviction, that Griff, in spite of his disappointment, can't help a burst of laughter, under cover of which Mrs. Wainwright gladly retires.

But when she is midway up the stairs she finds herself encircled by Griff's strong arms.

"Look here, you dear old auntie," he says, coaxingly, "of course that's all bosh, that last suggestion of yours, and I'm not going to have a faint heart about Olive. I had it with another girl" ("not with one of his cousins, I'm sure," Mrs. Wainwright thinks), "and I've lost her, but I'll not lose Olive Aveland for want of trying; will you go to see her with me to-morrow evening? You must."

She would rather that he asked her to go down in a diving-bell, or to take in *Macmillan's Magazine* for her house-maid. Still she can only say:

"If you wish it."

"I do wish it with my whole heart; I'm not going alone, and you can shut your ears, you know, or I'll whisper," and he laughs quite gaily, for he feels sure that his pertinacity will be rewarded with success. Poor Griff! He little knows that it is not for his coming that Olive is doomed to wait.

"If I must, I suppose I shall," she replies, getting herself away from Griff with an effort, as she hears a bedroom door open. Then she goes on to meet them, feeling that circumstances have made her sin against her daughters.

They surround her—swarming in their big dinner dresses all over her room as she changes her cap with shaking hands, and puts something light over her shoulders by way of looking festive. And they ask her who that letter was from? and what Griff said to her when they came out? and if she can imagine who the woman can be, and when he can have met her? until she is harassed into making ample confession of all she knows about it.

With all the Miss Wainwrights are practical. So they hear the confession, and then say, they "must speak about it after dinner; it won't do to keep Griff waiting." So they go down to dinner, and Griff, being very much absorbed, does not notice that they are all more or less constrained with him.

The following day Mrs. Wainwright is torn to pieces. Her daughters tell her that she "ought not to go and countenance anything of the sort," and the memory of her promise to Griff lies heavy on her heart. The excitement, the agitation, the disappointment make her ill, and opportunity brings on a bilious attack that sends her to bed completely prostrated. And then the eldest Miss Wainwright—the cousin who has resigned her own honorable intentions toward him in favor of her younger sisters—approaches him.

"Griff, dear," she begins, "I am quite old enough to speak to you on a very delicate subject."

Griff, who is inducting himself into a pair of faultlessly fitting, pale-gray gloves, gets scarlet, and frees his hands at once, feeling that something will be said that will prevent his taking the air with a light heart and in gay attire this day. Instinctively he looks round, and sees, with dismay, that the other six cousins have retired.

"I thought it better not to say anything to you before the girls," Miss Wainwright commences, solemnly, "especially before Arabella" (Arabella is the one whose hopes are brightest at the present juncture), "but, my dear Griff, I may speak to you as a sister, may I not?"

Griff assures her that she may.

"Poor mamma is too ill to venture to attempt to do it; though she feels it to be her duty, she has with much reluctance delegated her duty to me." And then Miss Wainwright proceeds, with much effusion, to expound her views concerning the young person at "Barr and Battle's."

"She's as well born and bred, and a precious

deal better educated than we are," Griff states. And Miss Wainwright, with much practicable worldly wisdom, shakes her head and answers:

"And if she were fifty times better born and bred and educated than we are, or than she is, all these facts would be as nothing compared to the one that she has been a show-room girl in a London shop; I can't help it, Griff, neither can you; we can't gag people, even if we tried, and people would talk; do give it up, dear; she has refused you; why go and humble yourself to a girl you ought not to marry?"

Griff is full of good family feeling, so he merely thanks his cousin for her kindly interest, and refrains from telling her how sorry she will be for this, if ever he does win Olive for his wife.

They know that he is slipping from their grasp when, by-and-by in the afternoon, Griff goes out, telling them that he shall dine at his club to-night, for, however things go with Olive, he knows very well that he will be in no mood for the home circle.

Olive has finished her day's work abroad, and now that she had her tea, there remains nothing more for her to do. True, there is the real womanly panacea of needle-work, but Olive does not care for needle-work very much, and very rarely touches the little feminine implement unless she has holes in her gloves and collars.

The gas is lighted, and it is just seven o'clock. Oh! the weary hours that she will have to pass before she will feel justified in going to bed, and striving to forget her troubles in sleep. The long weary hours, with no books, no music, no pleasant intercourse with her fellow-creatures to fill them! The prospect of her solitude overpowers her in her desolation, and she lays her arms on the table, and her head on her arms, and she is preparing to indulge in a headache-provoking, hearty cry, when "Mr. Poynter" is announced.

He has been inflating himself with hope all the way as he came, and the contrast between his appearance and the dolefulness which she had been anticipating strikes her joyfully, and makes her give him such a warm greeting.

"I am glad to see you, oh! I'm so glad to see you," she says, rising up and advancing to meet him, with a fervor she had never infused into her manner toward him before. And then she remembers that only yesterday she refused to marry him, and the awkwardness of it all embarrasses her for a moment or two, during which time he marks all her variations of color, and gathers what he believes to be valuable information from them.

"I've come in spite of your prohibition, you see, and I'm rewarded by your being the least bit in the world glad to see me; and now tell me, Olive, what made you write in that way yesterday?"

Deep in her heart, unacknowledged even to herself, there lives a hope that in some way or other Madge will find out that Philip does not love her, and will break off the engagement, and leave Philip honorably free to return to her (Olive). It is there, and every now and then it wells up and makes itself felt, though Olive has been trying her hardest of late to kill it. It wells up and makes itself felt now, and Olive could not marry Griffiths Poynter; no, not even if he were three times the dear, good fellow he is, not even to escape from the desolation which so overcame her previous to his coming in.

"I wrote yesterday as I should write to-day, or to-morrow, or every day," she answers. "I'm not a bit worth your liking in that way; what a pity that you should do it."

"The old love stands in my way," he says, sorrowfully. "Oh, Olive! if you would but believe that the memory of a first love won't last, can't last all your life; if you would but let me be the one to try and efface it," he pleads, very humbly.

Olive shakes her head. "It's not that; I'm not cherishing any folly of that sort," she says, feeling guiltily the whole time that she is doing the very thing she repudiates, "only my heart went sound asleep after that early mistake, and I'm sure that no one will ever have the power to wake it again; but we can be friends, though we can be nothing more; can't we?"

It is his turn to shake his head now.

"I can't be anything but friendly toward you,

if you mean that," he says; "but as for seeing you often—no."

"No, that would be folly, on second thoughts," she says, quite calmly. And then her desire to gain some information respecting Philip, overmasters her, and she says:

"When are you going home?"

"I may as well go at once, if you're not going to have anything to say to me."

"And when shall you see Madge?" she goes on, not noticing the latter part of his speech.

"Very soon; I shall go and tell Madge my troubles."

"You were very fond of Madge?" she says, in a sharp, questioning way, and he replies:

"Fond of her? God bless her, I loved her dearly, and thought for years that some day or other I should ask her to be my wife; but I never did, you know, luckily."

"Why luckily?"

"She would only have had the pain of refusing me, and now there's nothing of that sort between us. Do you know that poem of Peacock's, 'Love and Age?' I often think that when I am old I shall feel exactly toward Madge Roden as he did toward the one he addresses in that poem."

"She won't be Madge Roden then, she'll be Madge Fletcher," Olive says, sententiously, "and I don't remember enough of the poem to see the application in it to your case."

"These are the verses I had in my mind," he says, and then he quotes:

"And I lived on to wed another,
No cause she gave me to repine;
And when I heard you were a mother,
I did not wish the children mine.

"My own young flock in fair procession,
Made up a pleasant Christmas row.
My joy in them was past expression,
But that was thirty years ago."

Olive gives an unfeigned shudder, as he brings his quotation to an end.

"Gracious!" she says, "fancy living thirty years in this dull world without the society of the one we love—if we love anyone at all," she hastily adds; "what's the other verse? equally drearily resigned?"

"Now there was no attempt at anything like resignation in the first verse; how you pervert his meaning; he plainly avows that he has found full compensation; the other is the last verse of the poem, and the finest of the lot, I think:

"But tho' first love's impassion'd blindness
Has passed away in colder light,
I still have thought of you with kindness,
And shall do till one last good-night."

Olive puts out her hands to avert the stream of poetry. She is not sympathetic with the tenderly friendly feeling that fills Griff's heart for Madge.

"That's how you'll feel for Madge 'to the end,' is it?" she says; "no one will feel that for me."

"Olive, my love! give me the right to feel that—and more; give me the best right, a husband's right."

"I told you 'No,'" Olive says, softly, "and I meant it; it's no use going over the ground again and again. I shall live and die alone."

And this is all the satisfaction Griffiths has in return for making his aunt bilious, and braving his cousins' displeasure.

CHAPTER XXIV.

"AND HOW'S BRUNETTE?"

PHILIP, foot-sore, hungry, travel-stained, and surprised, is in one of his most uncompromising moods. It annoys him that any explanation should be necessary to account for his unexpected appearance. Not that "these people," as he instantly dubs the Westcotts in his mind, seem to expect any explanation. But he feels that one is due to them, since he has burst in upon them in this way, and will be very glad of the shelter of their roof for the night.

Finding Phil here too, apparently quite at home on Exmoor—on what he has come to regard as his own exclusive preserves, annoys him. "What's he larking about here for?" he asks

himself, suspiciously. And the suspicion makes itself manifest in his manner to his cousin, in a way the Westcotts feel inclined to resent, on the spot.

"What on earth brings you here?" Philip asks in an insolent way of Phil, the instant the relationship between them is made clear. And the handsomest Miss Westcott, whose plunging waltz has been interrupted, retorts, before Phil can re-join:

"He has more cause to ask that question in that tone of you, I think."

Good-natured Mrs. Westcott quietly standing by, marks that there is not a perfectly fair understanding between these two cousins thus strangely met under her roof, and hastens to interpose:

"The tale of the disaster will be told more easily, Mr. Fletcher, when you have changed these wet clothes and had some supper. 'Phil' (he is 'Phil' to the whole family), 'will you see to your cousin's comfort?'"

"Certainly; we've rigged one another out many a time before to-day, haven't we, old fellow," Phil answers, good-temperedly, as he conducts his cousin from the room. But they all see plainly that there is no responsive good-temper in that cousin's face.

"He's a surly, ill-tempered fellow, for all his good looks," one of the girls says. "I suppose he's the one who is going to be married to pretty Miss Roden?"

"And on the strength of that grand marriage he's inclined to lord it over our Phil," the other girl rejoins. And they both resolve to make more of Phil than ever, firmly believing that in their favors is to be found the true mandragora which can drug all disagreeables to rest.

Somehow or other, though Phil has nothing to do with his Madge, or his Madge's horse, Philip has a decided repugnance to mentioning Brunette. And yet he knows that it will be better for him to tell out the truth at once, for it will surely be dragged from him in the course of conversation. Why, indeed, should he hesitate about it? Nevertheless he does hesitate; and it is not until after he is arrayed in one of Phil's suits, and is ready to descend to the region from whence savory odors of *salmis* and broils of game are rising up, that he says, with laborious carelessness:

"By the way, the horse that came to grief to-day was Madge's mare Brunette; awful bore altogether."

Phil knows that he has not the slightest right in the world to let his blood rush from his heart to his head, and then go back again with a flop, as it appears to do, when he hears this. He knows that he has no business to let indignation vex him in the way it does at this unconcerned mention of a loss that will be a severe one to Madge, and that will be mourned by her as a bitter grief. He knows all this, and so he chokes back the words that are rising—the words of condemnation and rebuke. This is all he can do.

"Poor Miss Roden," he says; "she'll be very much cut up, I fear."

"There'll be a fuss about it, most likely," Philip says, drawing himself to his fine full height as he enters the drawing-room, and a pleasant feeling steals over him to the effect that the whole family must see how very much he is like "Phil" of whom they seem so fond, and how very much better looking he is.

Supper is spread in the library for him, "in order that he may not feel cut off from social intercourse, as he would if they banished him to the dining-room," Mrs. Westcott tells. For the library opens out of the drawing-room, and as his host sits down and takes a glass of sherry with Philip, the young men of the party go in at intervals and are introduced to him while he takes his supper leisurely.

He has ascertained how far Halsworthy is from Delabourn, and how far the Manor House, where Madge has gone through her illness, is, and he is at rest in his mind. When he has daintily satisfied his hunger, he goes back to the drawing-room, and addresses Phil:

"I find I'm nearer Halsworthy than the Manor House. I shall go over and have a look at the place to-morrow; will you come with me, Phil?"

"A look at what place?" Phil asks, aggravating-

ly enough, it must be confessed, for he perfectly well knows to what place his cousin refers.

"Why, my—Moorbridge House," Philip answers; and young Ronald Westcott, flirting violently with one of his cousins in the corner, assures that young person that he "can hardly stand the amount of side that fellow puts on."

"Oh, yes, I'll go—with pleasure," Phil says, hesitatingly. Then feeling really anxious that nothing should be done to make Madge anxious or uneasy, he gets himself closer to his cousin, and says, in a low voice:

"You'll let Miss Roden know as soon as possible that you're all safe, of course?"

"Shall I make you my messenger of good tidings, old boy?" Philip laughs, mockingly. "My dear fellow, the longer I keep the fate of that blessed mare of hers from her, the better for her health; she will not kill herself with anxiety about me."

He speaks this last sentence in a very low tone of voice, and Phil has no answer for him. Each word that Philip utters, each look that Philip gives when speaking of her, convinces Phil more and more that poor Madge has not done well.

In pursuance of their plan of making much of Phil, and of proving to Philip that "they don't think so much of him, though he is going to marry Miss Roden," the Miss Westcotts volunteer to drive the two young men over to Halsworthy in their own low, four-wheeled dog-cart, the next morning. The handsomest (she is also the eldest) Miss Westcott drives, and asks Phil to sit in front with her. And the one who is pushed behind with Philip leans over the rail and directs her conversation chiefly to Ronald's tutor. Altogether Philip is taught by these injudicious young ladies to feel himself of no account, and Philip does not like it.

He regains his proper position in a measure when he comes to Moorbridge House, for the servants are wise in their generation, and know well who will rule and always give the law, when Miss Madge marries him. So they serve him with sycophantish zeal; and the housekeeper comes forward with eager, earnest offers of luncheon. And Philip sees with satisfaction that "even those colts," as he calls the Westcotts, are a little impressed with the perfect order and "good style" of everything in this house, which is to be his.

The idea of its being his, and of his own importance when it shall be his, has grown upon him considerably of late. He has altered a good deal from the careless scape-grace he was when we knew him first. He has grown more selfish during this time of his prospective prosperity, and—woe for Madge—his temper is not as good as it used to be. The latent arrogance is cropping up visibly; in fact, the same arrogance that ejected him from many a good situation in those former days of need and poverty, when he did not dare to display it to the same extent that he does now.

He is a handsome, accomplished fellow, this Philip, and now that he is king of his own castle, as it were, he shows to great advantage in the eyes of the Miss Westcotts. He plays and sings well; and though, after the manner of colts, they laugh at first at the idea "of a man sitting down to play the piano," they are carried by his powerful baritone at once, and wish that their friend Phil had the same gift.

After the manner of colts, too, as soon as they are pleased with him, they frisk about him, flattering him most candidly, and unintentionally causing him to feel himself a conquering hero in very truth. They are void of all design, these pure-hearted hoydens; so, when they dance about him, begging him to sing "one more song, only one wee bit of a song, because they never heard anything so lovely in their lives as his voice," they don't mean a bit more than they say. But Philip is not of the order to accredit girls with meaning less.

Only Ronald, who has ridden over by the side of the dog-cart, is undazzled. He girds more than ever against the "amount of side that fellow puts on," and wishes with all his heart that pretty Miss Roden and Moorbridge House were going to fall to the lot of his friend Phil.

From the opposite wall to the piano, as Philip plays and sings, a bright girlish face, full of hope and happiness, and radiant with beauty, looks down upon the group, and seems to smile merry

approval of their proceedings. And Phil looks up at the pictured Madge, and recalls every incident of that one wretchedly happy ride he had with her, and hates himself for loving her—his cousin's promised bride—more than ever.

He is not so exclusively the object of the Miss Westcott's devotion on the homeward journey. Philip comes in for such a fair share of attention that he is quite contented to stay one more night at Delabourn. And when the next morning he starts for the Manor House, the girls speed the parting guest by accompanying him to the door-steps, from whence they watch him ride away, and shout farewells to him.

"Shall I give any message from you to Madge?" Philip asks, suddenly, of his cousin, who accompanies the happy lover a short distance.

"Remember me most kindly to her, and tell her how glad I am she's better."

"Won't that sound rather cruel?" Philip says, laughing; "you having been her cavalier on the memorable occasion, might surely say a little more about it."

"Would you like me to send word to her that I was a fool not to have remembered the landmarks better, and that I have been feeling myself a fool ever since?" Phil asks, in an annoyed tone.

"Well, I think that would be more flattering to her than the commonplace, 'Glad to hear she's better,'" Philip answers, carelessly.

"Say what you like—she won't misunderstand me," Phil says, recovering his good-temper, and then Philip begins to grumble.

"I hope she won't insist on heading a crusade against the crows for the recovery of the carcass of Brunette; I expect to be made to repent having touched the mare; Madge is capable of having a relapse, and going straight off into another brain-fever when she hears of it."

"She's incapable of doing anything to hurt you; as she lent you the mare, she'll do nothing to make you repent having ridden her," Phil says, reassuringly.

"Ah! but the worst of it is, I had taken the mare before she offered it to me; and when I mentioned that trifling fact, I don't think she liked it; it's all incomprehensible to me where women draw the line; so far and no further you may go with safety—after that a sudden destruction comes upon you unawares, and a criminal is a fool to what you feel."

To all this Phil answers not a word. He has been listening eagerly, hoping that one word of regret for the fate of the mare, because she was dear to Madge, will fall from Philip's lips. But no such word is uttered. His sorrow for Brunette is as selfish as is every other joy and sorrow of his.

There is something that strongly resembles anger between these two young men, when they part presently, though they call each other "old fellow," and each adds, "let's hear of you soon." Philip's last words are:

"If I were you, I'd find out how old Westcott will cut up; the family's good, and the girls are passable, and you might have either of them."

To this Phil vouchsafes no answer, for he is thinking that it was in this spirit, probably, that Philip asked for Madge's hand and heart.

It is late that night before Philip Fletcher reaches the Manor House, and instantly, on entering the yard even, he is met by an anxious group. Madge is distraught with anxiety and suspense, he is told. And then simultaneously a questioning cry arises, as they detect that he is not on Brunette.

He answers them almost roughly, for he is sorely perplexed and annoyed. "If you'll only give a fellow, who has been nearly smashed to pieces, time to draw breath, you shall know what has happened," he says; "the long and the short of it is, that the mare lost her temper and killed herself, and nearly killed me; but one explanation will suffice, I think, and I'd better give that to Madge."

"Go up stairs speaking cheerfully," Mrs. Henderson suggests; "Madge is weak enough to declare that she won't go to bed until she has seen you," and then Mrs. Henderson pities him, as she would anyone who was unlucky enough to be the innocent cause of giving intense pain to Madge.

"My dear boy," she says, "you have the satisfaction of knowing that Madge will feel that if anything could have spared her pet, you would have done that thing."

And Philip winces under a conscience prick, as he vividly remembers the way he lashed and spurred poor Brunette into that last fatal burst.

Her face is as pink as the border of her dressing-gown as he goes into the room, and she comes forward to meet him with an excited gladness gleaming in her eyes, that makes him tremble for what he has to tell.

"Lost your way, dear, I suppose," she cries out in her ringing tones, "like I did with your cousin; thank Heaven, it hasn't ended in the same way; you're safe back, dear Philip; and how's Brunette?"

CHAPTER XXV.

"WHY, PHILIP, YOU LOVE HER!"

"AND how's Brunette?"

If she had "only given him breathing-time," he tells himself hastily, he would have told out the tale of Brunette's death so truly, tenderly, and well. But as it is, the demand for information strikes him dumb for a moment or two; and when he does speak, he can't screw his courage to the striking point; he can't stab the girl who is hanging on his answer, whose very eyes are questioning concerning the well-being of her horse; he can't tell her the truth.

"Brunette? oh! she's all right; but, Madge, you seem more anxious about the mare than about me. I've news for you, dear," he adds, with a reckless resolve to turn the conversation at any cost to himself or Madge; "whom do you think I've seen?"

Madge declines to guess. She dislikes being rebuked for her loving anxiety about the mare that was hers before she was Philip's. But she does not decline in an aggrieved or aggravating way.

"Tell me, Philip. I am not a good hand at speculation."

There is not a grain of sulkiness in Madge Roden's whole nature; but in very truth now her heart is too full for her to go into the folly of guessing about anything. The girl has been pondering about the possible whereabouts of these two absentees for hours; and now one of them has reproved her because she has questioned him concerning his fellow-traveler, about whom he ought to have been interested for her sake.

So the notes in which she says, "Tell me, Philip, I am not a good hand at speculation," fall flatly on his ears, and hurt that sensitive self-love, and impart just that degree of coolness to his manner which may be felt but not defined. It falls on the girl who has been so very ill like a biting blast from the North. She dreads the continuance of it so fearfully, that she does violence to the truthfulness of her nature, and affects to fall into that humor of his (that humor, alas! which is past), of guessing whom it is he has met with.

"I feel sure it's Griff," she says; "dear old Griff; why hasn't he been to see me?"

She can't feel a genuine enthusiasm about this friend of her youth; but she gets up such a successful imitation of it, that Philip feels at once that he is provided with a real grievance.

"It was not 'Grif,'" he says, and his words fall off his lips with the distinct rattle of shingle; "it was not Griff, if Griff was the person who behaved so very, very obtrusively that day at Winstaple."

"I called him 'Grif' before I could speak plainly," she says, with a mighty effort at calmness, an effort that enables her to swallow the mountain of indignation that has rapidly developed from the choking ball, to which we are all well accustomed.

She is leaning back in her chair as she says this, looking so fair and fragile, that he is almost constrained to proclaim himself incapable of appreciating her on the spot—almost inclined to proclaim himself unworthy, and then to vanish forever from these fettering influences, and hold himself a free man once more. Free to seek Olive Aveland.

Almost, but not quite. In such matters as these Philip is a coward at heart. So he prevaricates and persuades according to his wont; and as soon as expediency forces him back into the shallow semblance of good humor, he says, adroitly:

"I suppose it's the fact of my overestimating him so very highly that made me impatient of your guessing the name of any lesser man; just im-

agine my meeting with Phil on the moor, he is."

"Your cousin," she interrupts, sharply.

And then all her weariness, all her doubts, all her fears, and all her love, conspire together, rise up and overmaster her.

"Oh!" why has he come?" she says.

"Apparently he entertained the notion that he was at liberty to come without rendering up his reasons to me," Philip answers. "Why shouldn't he be here as well as anywhere else? What is he to you, that you should question?"

He checks himself as he utters this word, for even in his anger he feels he has gone too far. But he has an uneasy feeling that Mrs. Henderson and old Miss Roden are lying in wait to reprove him for showing want of consideration for Madge, and he is altogether thrown out of gear.

"What, indeed?" Madge suffers herself to sigh; then the absurdity of it strikes her, the absurdity and the injustice of it. Why should she sigh? why should she lachrymously ask, what, indeed? why shouldn't she take the intelligence of Phil's near vicinity cheerfully and unconcernedly?

"He's your cousin, you know, Philip, like your brother almost," she says, in her natural, blithe tones. And then she holds her hands out to him, and puts her face up toward him, and he knows that he is dismissed for the time, and that she is yearning for the love and sympathy she will find when he is gone, in the companionship of her aunt and friend.

It comes upon him strongly just now that not so would Olive have dismissed him under such circumstances. All Madge's sweet patience, all Madge's innocent charms, all Madge's delicate consideration for himself, are as nothing to him as he contrasts her with that other one, upon whom he had trampled with impunity so frequently.

But the time is not ripe yet for the final overthrow of this castle of ambition which he has built of cards. Just a little longer he will feign, though he fumes most tryingly against the necessity of doing it.

"I didn't come to an end of my explanation," he begins; "either I grew misty, or you grew impatient, which was it, Madge? Phil's down here tutoring with a young fellow called Ronald Westcott; they're staying at Westcott's uncle's place, Delabourn, and he's awfully gone on one of the girls."

Madge listens to all this gravely, decorously, but for all this outward grave decorum she is sorely disturbed within. She does not believe that Phil is awfully gone on any girl but herself, and she feels a traitor to Philip for believing that his cousin is thus falsely true to her still. Underlying this sentiment there is a feeling that Phil is unkind and ungenerous in coming back, and involuntarily she prays that she may not be led into temptation.

"I shall be well enough to go home in a few days," she says, making an effort to detach her thoughts from the dangerous subject; "how glad I shall be, though I have such kindness here; but home is home. I shall rest and enjoy it more than ever."

"I should think so," Philip grumbles. Then he can't resist the desire he has to blame somebody else, since he feels so miserably to blame himself, and he adds: "I know that I shall feel considerably relieved when I get you out of this den, to which my cousin's confounded imprudence consigned you."

And then they say good-night once more and part; Madge calling to him, as he reaches the door, to "be sure to order Brunette round in front of her window early to-morrow morning."

The ladies are all assembled in a little up stairs sitting-room, and they call him in as he is passing along the corridor. Mrs. Graves, eager, brisk, and bright-eyed, is the one to address him first.

"Well! she took it more quietly than I expected; much more quietly than I should have taken the news of a favorite horse of mine being done for."

"There was no need to go into that little matter to-night," he says, as carelessly as he can; but his eyes rove from Mrs. Graves to Mrs. Henderson's face, and it stings him to read marked disapproval there.

"It would have been wrong to disturb her to-night, wouldn't it?" he pleads against his will.

"The less Madge is deceived the better for her happiness and yours," she answers coldly, for she has been very fond of Philip, and though that fondness is decreasing rapidly, she cannot bear that he should show himself in his true mean colors before strangers.

The reproof annoys him, partly because he knows that he deserves it, and partly because the friendship of the reprover stood him in good stead in former days, and he shrinks from casting it behind him now. But he reminds himself that very soon he will be master of Madge and her actions, and of Moorbridge House.

It is absurd to start by being in awe of one of Madge's friends, even though she is the best and dearest of them all. Ay! even though she has the mighty claim on him of having been kind to Olive.

"Even if it were a more important matter than it is, it rests entirely between Madge and myself; understand that, if you please, entirely."

There is an unmistakable frown on Philip's fair, handsome face as he says this, and a corresponding one darkens Mrs. Henderson's instantly. Tender, and gentle-hearted, and mannered as she is, she has a high spirit that no assumption on Philip's part can daunt.

"You can hardly expect me to tell her lies if she asks about her mare. I should dread some awful punishment overtaking me if I deceived the most truthful, unsuspecting nature in this world."

She passes from the room and takes her way to Madge's; but before she reaches the door, Philip, with all the winning grace that fits him like a glove, and that he can assume at any moment, is by her side.

"My punishment has commenced already," he whispers; "I'm growing half-hearted about many things, I'm losing your friendship, and I've lost Madge's love."

Mrs. Henderson is gentle-hearted, as has been said, and now, as he speaks what she knows to be wholly true, she is full of pity for him.

"Poor fellow!" she whispers; "it's a tangled yarn, I fear; but honest, straight-forward endeavors to unravel it might bring happiness to us all again."

"What do you mean?" he asks, suspiciously.

"Oh, Philip! you say you 'have lost her love;' has not she lost yours, if, indeed, she ever had it? Don't let the thought of position and fortune drag you to perdition and Madge to misery."

"Are you advising me to break the engagement?" he asks, angrily.

"God knows I'm not capable of advising any longer; I implore!"

"Thanks; that my cousin, the rightful man, may reign in my stead?" he responds, savagely.

"No, Mrs. Henderson, Madge shall pay a penalty for her fickleness as well as myself. You both knew the worst of me when I proposed to Madge; what have I done since to forfeit the good opinion you then held of me, in spite of many things? We must both make the best of it."

With this he goes away, and Mrs. Henderson's heart grows heavy as she feels that she is compelled to relinquish her last hope.

"He can't be stung into breaking it off," she sighs; "all his nice feeling is pretense; he is selfish to the core of his heart."

"Who was that whispering to you in the corridor?" Madge asks. "I hate people to whisper; it always sets me wondering, and then I hate myself for that, because it's small curiosity. Who was it?"

"Philip."

"Oh, Philip! and why didn't you both speak out? Did you think I was asleep, or didn't you want me to hear what you were talking about?"

"Madge, dear, the confinement of the sick-room is telling upon you, indeed," Mrs. Henderson says, with a very transparent attempt at gayety.

"Was Philip telling you about his cousin?"

"About his cousin? No, dear."

"His cousin is down near to us," Madge goes on, rapidly; "at least he's at Delabourn with some people called Westcott, and—and I don't think Philip likes his being there."

"He said nothing to me about it," Mrs. Henderson says, briefly. Phil is a subject on which she will not be tempted to talk. "Madge, dear, go to

bed now; to-morrow you are to go down stairs; the next day, possibly, you may go home."

The prospect of a change after the long, dreary confinement to her room, thrills Madge with pleasure. She is still young enough to be liable to these abrupt changes of feelings, still young enough to cast out sorrow at the most distant approach of joy.

"It will be great fun going down into that funny old room again," she says; "I'll ask Mrs. Graves to have her china washed, and Philip and I will re-arrange it; and Brunette shall be brought round to the window."

Her eyes, beaming with this small excitement, are fixed on Mrs. Henderson's face, and a wave of color, a flicker of emotion suddenly passes over that face, and makes the girl exclaim:

"What is the matter? What have I said?"

"Nothing, nothing, Madge," Mrs. Henderson says, in that hasty tone of wishing to drop the subject, which invariably makes one question more deeply and eagerly.

"But I must have said something," Madge persists; "what could have made you look red and put out; was it about the china? or (with a quick qualm) was it about Brunette?"

For a full moment Mrs. Henderson hesitates, hopes to think of something to say that may avert the necessity of her dealing this blow which will hurt both Madge and Philip in different ways. Now that it has come to this point, she feels her position of witness, and testifier against Philip's candor most bitterly. Oh! dear, dear! Her own love-troubles had scarcely ceased to occupy a prominent position in her mind, before she was distracted by the love-troubles of others. All these thoughts dart through her mind in that moment of time, and then Madge says again, very impatiently this time:

"Well, well! what is it about?"

"Oh, Madge!" Mrs. Henderson says, fairly cornered now, "you have much to be humbly grateful and thankful for, dear. Philip is safe, but he met with an awful accident, and Brunette is——"

"Not 'all right,' as Philip told me she was," Madge interrupts, with her eyes kindling and her mouth quivering.

There is a long, awkward pause after this. Madge leans back with her face buried in her hands, not crying but thinking, with horrible intensity. "This can't go on always," she reflects, "this system of deception would quickly drive me mad with conjecture!" With a dry sob and a gulp she rouses herself, and puts her two hands out to Mrs. Henderson, who answers the appeal by telling all she knows of the end of Brunette.

Madge listens to the recital without saying a word. She makes no show of that aching at her heart, which is, after all, not so much on account of the death of the horse, as it is on account of the disposition of the man who is to be her husband. The way in which he has treated it, and her in connection with it, seems to be symptomatic of something from which Madge recoils. He has not been faithful and true about a thing which he may consider small. How will it be about greater matters?

"Philip wished to keep it from you to-night, he was so anxious you should have undisturbed rest," Mrs. Henderson says, making the best of it, and Madge answers piteously:

"We won't talk about it, please; to-morrow the light will make it all clear, but to-night I feel in a mist."

There is not a shadow of reproach on Madge's face when he comes to her the next morning. She is down stairs by this time, dusting and toying with and arranging Mrs. Graves's quaint old china figures, and vases, and bowls, and tazzas. She has schooled herself well in the night. She has tried to put herself in Philip's place, and has resolved to save him from feeling hurt at the cost of any amount of trouble to herself. He is touched into tenderness, and something like truth, by her demeanor. And the kiss he gives her in return for the sympathetic way her hand nestles into his when the interest of the story of Brunette culminates, has more of a lover's warmth in it than any previous one has had. And so the glow of the remembrance, at least, of the sun of happiness is over these young people for a while.

Presently Madge begins searching in her pocket.

et. "I have a letter here to show you. What can I have done with it? Oh, Philip! I'm so shocked, and so will you be, I know. No! this isn't it; I did think she'd have confided in me. Oh! here it is, look, from Olive Aveland." And she hands him a letter from the girl for whom his heart is sick, without a single suspicion in her mind.

Tingling all through his veins (for his blood is less false than his actions), Philip takes the letter, and tries to read what Olive has to say to Madge.

The characters dance before his eyes, and Madge's words, "Oh, Philip! I'm so shocked, and so will you be, I know," keep on ringing in his ears. Can Olive be married, or be going to marry? He can't control himself, though he knows that he is calling Madge's keenest attention on himself. He holds the letter with a shaking hand before eyes that see nothing, and lets his head drop lower on his breast.

This continues for a period of time that can hardly be computed. To Madge, upon whom so many things dawn while it lasts, it seems long. But an echo would not have had time to die away upon the ear before Madge breaks the silence—breaks the silence with words that, in the midst of his anguish at the loss that will surely ensue of so much that he keenly appreciates, give him a certain relief.

"Why, Philip, you love her," Madge says, "and you would have married me!"

CHAPTER XXVI.

"HE WILL RETURN, I KNOW HIM WELL."

THERE is no going back, after this, for Madge and Philip Fletcher—no possibility of their resuming their former relations, after that flash of truth has irradiated Madge's mind. Philip, with a vivid remembrance of the Moorbridge estate, and all the honor, and glory, and luxury the Moorbridge estate represents, would make a struggle to obliterate the impression, and have everything as it was before. But he reads in Madge's face and Madge's manner that the struggle would be a futile one. And with a biting sense of failure upon him, he lays Olive's letter down.

"I can't read it now," he mutters; and his head is bent, and his eyes are fixed on the floor, and he knows, for all these averted looks, that Madge is not the least bit in the world angry with him. He feels that she is full of pity for him, and somehow this pity galls him, and tries him very hardly.

"And now I know that you must have loved her like this before ever you saw me. Poor, poor Philip, and poor Olive! how awful for her!"

The compassionate accents, the entire abnegation of Madge's own right to his love and loyalty, make him wince. He can't speak, or at any rate he does not attempt to speak; he only blinks away two tears that will, provokingly enough, well up and blur his vision.

Madge has risen from the sofa where she had been seated by his side, and now she has placed herself on a low chair just in front of him. There is in her manner nothing but such confidence and friendliness, that it makes Philip feel positively abject. He feels that she is not angry with him for having preferred another girl to herself. He knows that every other part of his conduct is condoned save this—that loving as he does, he would have married her.

"I wish you could make up your mind to read Olive's letter," Madge says, presently; "there's no complaint in it, but oh!" (with a shudder) "when you find what she's been obliged to do, poor darling, your blood will boil—mine does."

He looks up at this, eagerly, questioningly.

"Has she married?" he asks, finding his voice at last.

"Married! no; gone into a show-room as a——"

She is checked by a sigh of relief from him. "Did you know that and keep it from me, Philip?" with quick discernment. Then, as he does not answer, she adds: "I wish you would try to tell me the——" She is on the verge of saying "the truth," but substitutes the words "all about it" instead.

He tells her something, he tells her many things,

about it. But he does not tell her "all," or nearly all, that there is to tell about poor infatuated Olive and himself. But to so much of his story as it pleases him to narrate, Madge listens with her heart in her eyes, and her mind busily at work.

"Poor, poor Olive! fancy you're meeting her by accident in town, and you two being obliged to be cool, and constrained, and conventional, in your behavior to each other."

"Poor Madge," might be said with greater accuracy, if she had only known how little coolness, or constraint, or conventionality, there had been in that intercourse of theirs about which she so besprinkled them with pity. "Philip," earnestly, "you can't let this go on now?"

"Do you mean to say that you will have done with me altogether because of this?" he asks; "I have assured you that it is a thing over and done with."

"Your love for Olive over and done with—is that what you mean?"

"Yes," he says; but his voice quails as he utters the lie.

"Oh, Philip, how can you tell me so? Why do you say so when you must feel that I know better? Philip, I couldn't marry a man in whose face I'd seen such love for another woman as I saw just now in yours for Olive." Madge grows scarlet as she says this; but he well understands that it is not jealousy which is forcing the blood to her brow and cheeks. It is not jealousy; it is some far finer feeling.

"It costs you very little to turn down this page in the book of your life forever, apparently," he says, bitterly.

"No; it costs me more than it will you, Philip," she says, frankly; "even now I'm tingling with a foreshadowing of the mortification and humiliation I shall feel when this gets known; and all my friends will wonder, and surmise, and so stao me unthinkingly. But may I say something to you that's very personal? though the page we've read together is turned down forever?"

He nods consent, still moodily sitting there in front of her; and now the girl grows very earnest.

"Philip, work for Olive; prove to everybody that you're as worthy of her at last as you've been faithful in your heart all along. I shall feel so proud of you when you have won a place, and can claim Olive, and I can turn round on everybody and say this is the girl he loved from the first, and this is the woman he has married, and both he and she are very dear friends of mine."

For an answer to this Philip rises up, and says:

"By Jove! there is no hope for me with you again; good-bye, Madge; whatever I do in the world, whether it's good or bad, I shall feel, at least, that you wished me to do what was well."

Then they shake hands; such a long, hearty hand-clasp it is. And, somehow (so inconsistent are all human beings,) this moment of parting is a bitter one to them both.

Other eyes than Madge's see him go away. Other eyes than Madge's notice the discomfiture which is painted on his face, which is legibly expressed in his gait and bearing. And, one and all, they misjudge Madge, and say:

"It has been too much for her. I knew she would not be patient any longer, now that he has killed her mare."

Madge is still sitting in that chair fronting the sofa, when Mrs. Henderson comes in presently with some fluid specially suited to invalids, in a tea-cup. Rather to Mrs. Henderson's surprise (and this lady has had considerable experience), Madge is neither in tears nor in passion. She seems absorbed in thought, but rouses herself readily enough, and actually broaches the topic herself.

"Did you see Philip as he went out?"

"Yes, I did," Mrs. Henderson says, "but not to speak to him. Madge, my darling, what has happened? is anything wrong?"

"I think something will be right, at last, that has been wrong for a long time," Madge says, with a certain enthusiasm. "All that has actually happened is this: Philip and I are not going to be married."

This announcement is a shock to Mrs. Henderson, although she has come in prepared to hear tidings of an abnormal nature. It is always rather shocking to hear for the first time of the dissolution of such a partnership as Philip and Madge

had announced themselves as about to enter into. For a moment or two she cannot tell whether she is glad or sorry. It is so utterly unlike anything that she has hitherto believed Madge to be capable of—this disannulling of a bond—that she is more surprised than anything else.

Eventually she finds words to say:

"Your doing or his, dear?"

"Neither of us," Madge says, promptly, "it did itself. You will know all there is to know before long; and now, dear, will you go and tell Aunt Lucy, and let us go home?"

Madge had grown pale through very earnestness while making this appeal, and so, in a half-sympathetic, half-perplexed spirit, Mrs. Henderson obeys her, and goes to Aunt Lucy.

"Don't be agitated," she begins, "but I must tell you that something very unforeseen has occurred between Madge and Philip."

"Have they—they haven't quarreled?" Aunt Lucy gasps, when Mrs. Henderson has brought her halting statement to a conclusion. "Dear! dear! that it should have come to this!" And Aunt Lucy proceeds to drop a few silent tears over something or other, she is not quite sure what.

"Has she broken it off with the young man because of the fatal accident to her Brunette?" Aunt Lucy asks, with mysterious confidentialness, presently. Philip had sunk into a mere "young man" again in her estimation, now that he is no longer to be looked upon as linked to Madge.

"She says she didn't break it off," Mrs. Henderson says, dubiously; "but"—

"But you don't mean to say he has jilted her?" Aunt Lucy cries out, in that holy wrath which is apt to inflame the breast of woman when anyone dear to them are accused of being put in the position of the "left." "Oh, you don't mean to say he has jilted her?" she repeats, wailingly. And then she picks up heart of grace and adds, wailingly:

"Well, better so, than that she should have been linked for life to scum of earth that goes about without proper introductions."

Mrs. Henderson feels that this is a cut at her for having accepted Philip so readily. But she is not in a mood to resent such cuts now. Her own bitter consciousness of aptitude for being used as a tool is upon her to the extent of exercising every particle of pride. All she says in reply, therefore, is:

"Better so, better so—yes, a thousand times; but, dear Miss Roden, there has been a contest, and we shall never know who gave the sharpest strokes; only this—how shall I word it? Madge is not wounded in the way you fear."

Miss Roden questions and cross-questions, and Mrs. Henderson replies and explains as well as she is able to do. But they neither of them come to a clearer understanding of the case than this—namely, that the marriage between Philip Fletcher and Madge Roden is broken off. The girl who so quietly and interestedly superintends the packing operations presently, does not look like a jilted woman. And yet! she has avowed that she did not "do it," but it "did itself," which is the verbal refuge jilted women generally take.

There was a very good parting this same day between the strange mistress of the manor and the girl who had been her guest. The old lady, too, had witnessed the manner of Philip's exit from the place where he had been wont to come and play the part of "young lord-lover." And something in it recalled to her mind an incident of the days when she, too, "was very young and fair."

"My dear," she whispers, giving Madge's hand a final farewell grip, "I had a trouble when I was young, and it went *here*" (and she touches her forehead lightly as she speaks). "Mr. Graves wasn't the man I wished to marry when I cared for any of the good that a real marriage means. I made my mistake at the last, my dear—you've got over yours at first; you'll end your life with something better than a dumb animal to love."

And with this prophecy ringing in her ears, Madge departs from the place to which she had come with mail so many weeks ago—from the place in which Fate has commanded that the bond be broken which existed between Phil's cousin and herself.

There is supreme difficulty to the girl in taking up the links of the old life at home again. The old life! do I say? She can never live that again.

She has had her lover and her experiences; and her experiences remain with her though she has lost her lover. Remain with her, and disable her for the old life of childish pleasure in the scenes and the people she has known from her childhood; disable her for the old, absorbing enjoyment in the quiet, girlish pursuits—in the peaceful uninteresting Halsworthy routine. So much has happened since that day when she rode away so blithely on Brunette with Phil by her side, that she can hardly believe that she is the same girl.

Nevertheless she makes an effort to be the same, or, at any rate, to do the same things as of old. She resumes her part of young Lady Bountiful in the parish. She again organizes croquet parties, and Mrs. Henderson is more to her than ever, and is more sought by her than ever. But even to this dear friend Madge says very little about Philip, and nothing about the real cause of the rupture. She confesses to taking the keenest interest in him still; and when she does mention him, does so in a hearty, genial way that upsets the theory of her heart being hurt, or of hate having taken the part of love. She even avers one day that she "is longing to hear from Philip: that she thinks Philip unkind and thoughtless in not writing to her."

She says this in a passion of vexation to her aunt one morning when a budget of letters have been turned out from the post-bag; and her aunt is filled with bewilderment on the spot. Aunt Lucy has no precedents of her own to go upon, but she "knows what is right" under such painful circumstances.

"My dear," she says, kindly, "is it wise of you to permit yourself to hanker after any—even the most distant—intercourse with Mr. Philip Fletcher any longer?"

"I don't know about its being wise," Madge says, "but it's natural, surely; at any rate, I do long to hear from him; I'm always hoping and expecting that Philip will write and tell me that he has done something that will make us all very happy again."

"You don't mean to tell me," Aunt Lucy says, as fast as she can, but with her utterance considerably impeded by her indignation, "you don't mean to tell me that, after all, you would accept him again, Madge?"

There is supreme comfort and re-assurance to the old lady in Madge's stare of unfeigned surprise, at such a supposition. There is almost joy to Aunt Lucy in the definite "No" which follows it. And yet with it all there is a sort of vexation that Madge should puzzle her so completely.

"If you can feel such surprise at the mere idea entering my mind," she says, stiffly, "you ought not wish to hear from the poor young man; intercourse which may be sport to you may be death to him."

At this suggestion Madge smiles sadly. There is something touching to her in the idea of anyone supposing there can be "death," or even "pain," to Olive Aveland's passionate lover in intercourse with herself, Madge Roden. But a sense of respect for her Aunt causes her to offer this meagre explanation:

"You'll understand why I'm longing to hear from him by-and-by, when he does what I hope and expect he will do; and oh, dear, I hope he won't be long about it, for I do sadly want a change."

"What can she mean by it?" Miss Roden asks of Mrs. Henderson, after giving that lady the heads of this conversation. And Mrs. Henderson has to confess herself as ignorant of her young friend's meaning as is her interlocutor.

Madge has written a frank, loving letter to Olive, conjuring the latter to "come and stay at Moorbridge House as a companion, friend—anything she likes. You may call yourself my governess, and teach poor ignorant me any one of the dozens of things you know, you proud, independent thing—only come; I should be happier, and so would you be, for we love each other, Olive. I am lonely very often. Philip Fletcher and I have broken off our engagement. He never loved me *me* bit; but we shall always be friends, and when he is the husband of the girl he loves I shall be fonder of him than ever." "There," says sagacious Madge, as she indites this paragraph, "that will prepare her for the offer he'll make her soon,

her mind will be easy about me; she will feel that I know all about it, and am ready to say, bless ye, my children, when they're united."

This letter brings possibilities that she had believed to be burned out well before Olive again. It causes her heart to throb with a joyful hope to which that poor oft-tortured organ has been a stranger. It sends her down on her knees in a spasm of gratitude—in a feeble, hysterical burst of praise and thanksgiving, for that she has been mercifully preserved from marrying Griffiths Poynter in her despair. It sends her to Barr and Battle's show-room in such a glow of renewed vigor, and beauty, and hope, that she makes the room, which is dingy by reason of a thick fog which is reigning, almost glow. The air of rosy happiness which she diffuses illuminates the whole place, and places the mantles in such a burning light in the eyes of customers that she sells briskly this day, and does not loathe her occupation. For Philip is free, and he loves her.

She is singing in her heart all day. "He will return, I know him well," is the burden of her song. Her own Philip, her always-loved Philip. "He had been true to himself and to her, and had confessed to Madge, and Madge had released him, like an angel as she was." This is the view Olive chooses to take of the blissful change which has come about. She almost dances as she goes hither and thither during her work. She almost hears the words, the tones, in which he will plead to put an end, at once and forever, to the separation which has lasted far too long already.

Perhaps there will be a letter awaiting her when she goes home this evening. Or perhaps he will be there himself awaiting her, anxious to set her heart and his own at rest without delay. Madge does not say how long it is since they have arrived at the clear understanding that has brought such bliss to Olive.

Higher and higher her heart soars into the realms of hope, as the door is opened promptly in answer to her knock, and her sympathetic landlady tells her, with a face all aglow with satisfaction, "that a gentleman is in the parlor—one you'll be glad to see, miss." It does not occur to Olive that Philip is a stranger to the woman. "It must be he;" it never enters her head that it can be another. She bounds up stairs, flashing out thanks from her joyful eyes as she passes the landlady; she glances into the little parlor, and there sitting dolefully by the low-burning fire she sees Griffiths Poynter.

In the heat of her passionate disappointment she grows unjust and ungenerous. In the first pang of her pain she feels as if she must smite some one; and the first one who comes to her hand is the faithful, inoffensive fellow who would save her every pain if he could, at any cost to himself.

"Oh, it is only you" what did you come for?" she says; and then her overwrought spirit gives way, and she sits down and begins to cry; for she has not learned the lesson yet; she has not learned to distinguish the right man from the wrong; she can't make up her mind to "ring out the false, and ring in the true." And so she sits down and cries at Griffiths Poynter. "Just as though he was hateful to her," he feels, and shows, by the angry, reproachful fire in her eyes, that finally burns away her tears, that she is not feigning.

"I have come to tell you something about an old friend of yours. I wouldn't have intruded upon you after—after what passed between us the last time we met, if I hadn't thought my news would justify my intrusion."

He pauses, and she looks up inquisitively. She feels a conviction that there is something about Philip, though Griff knows nothing of Philip in connection with herself. She won't question him in words, but her eyes are full of inquiry, and he answers them at once.

"The news is from my part of the country. Madge Roden has been very ill! did you know it?"

"I heard from Madge this morning," Olive answers; "she tells me she has been ill; but she didn't make much of it."

"It's not her way to make much of anything unpleasant that happens to herself," Griff responds, loyally. "Did she tell you anything else?"

Olive knows well to what he refers now. But she does not dare to speak. The palpitation at.

her heart would cause her tones to tremble, and she shrinks from speaking of Philip in trembling tones to Griffiths Poynter. So she only turns a flushing face toward him, and he goes on gravely:

"Her engagement with that man—that Mr. Fletcher—is broken off: thank God."

"Thank Heaven!" Olive echoes fervently. She has no further consideration for Griffiths. He has dared to disparage the man she loves. A faint glimmering of the truth flashes across Griffiths' mind. Then he looks at the girl, who seems to him to be much, too exalted and noble a creature to care for anyone so despicable as he firmly believes Philip to be. He scorns himself for having entertained the notion for an instant of Madge's recreant lover being dear to Olive Aveland. And so he executes another mistake.

"You feel as I do, glad of anything, however painful at the time, which has brought this about; marriage with a fellow without an atom of principle to a girl like Madge!"

"How dare you come to me and say a word against Philip Fletcher!" she cries out, sharply; "how can you be so cruel and so coarse? whatever your jealousy may prompt you to think, how dare you say it to me!"

"Oh, Olive!" he stammers out, overwhelmed with sorrow for the girl who is building upon such shifting sands—with sorrow for the girl and pain for himself, that such a one as Philip should be preferred to him. "Oh, Olive! is this the reason?"

"Don't, don't, don't," she whimpers out, ashamed and abashed, now that she has declared herself in this way; "isn't it bad enough as it is, without my having to talk about it and explain; why did you sting me into saying what I did?" she asked with a sudden stamp of her foot, like a petulant child, instead of the trouble-tamed woman she was; why did you come here and torment me into proclaiming myself a fool? it wasn't kind, it wasn't honest, it wasn't manly!"

"Olive! treat me as a brother, and try to believe that as a brother would save you if you had one, so I will now, if you'll let me; yes, in any way, however it may hurt me."

He is desperately shocked at the open exhibition of her love for the man he believes to be a scoundrel; for he feels that she has been forced into making it by latent despair. But he forces himself to offer her his aid; and even if she bids him go and bring Philip from the nethermost ends of the earth, he would do her bidding. It is a blow to her enthusiasm, therefore, and he experiences altogether something like the sensation a shower-bath might give him, when Olive (feeling ashamed of herself the whole time) flashes at him with the words:

"Brotherly aid! what do you mean? Do you suppose I want you to go and hunt up Philip Fletcher, and ask him what his intentions are? I know them well enough, thank Heaven; I know that, now he has got his order of release, he will come back to me, and how happy I shall be at last!"

For one moment there is about her an air of irrepressible triumph. The next her head droops low, and she murmurs:

"Forgive me, Griffiths; and if you won't forgive me altogether, forget me, at any rate, as I have been to-night."

"I can do nothing for you?" he asks, hesitatingly; "you and Mr. Fletcher understand each other."

She raises her eyes to his face, and dashes all hope from his heart. "Yes, we understand each other," she says, and shivers a little as she commits herself to the statement; for her fainting soul tells her that she may have affirmed too much.

And he accepts the statement in its full force without the smallest reservation, and goes out, presently, crushed and crestfallen, firmly believing that Olive will marry Philip Fletcher after a very brief delay, and that he will make her miserable.

"At any rate," Grif. thinks, humbly and mournfully, "I have no further right to intrude myself into her life; that is over."

There is no letter from Philip the following morning. But still Olive makes an effort to be as she was yesterday—to be as light of heart and foot. But the effort is beyond her. Toward the end of the day the elasticity goes from both, and it is a

very springless Olive who eventually obeys a call to wait upon a specially hard-to-please customer.

The new-comer stands with her back to Olive as the latter comes up with a trimmed polonaise in hand. The lady is slender, graceful in figure, rather girlish and flighty in action, as she perpetually appeals to an old gentleman who stands by her side to indorse her opinion about different things. As Olive nears them they turn, and the old gentleman says, "Bless my soul, my dear child!" and the lady's blue eyes open wide, and Olive finds herself face to face with the Tollingtons.

With a sob and a gulp she lets her burden fall, and holds her hands out to her father's old friend. And at that moment Mrs. Tollington frisks towards some one who is coming into the show-room, and says:

"We won't keep you another moment, Mr. Fletcher. I'll choose my polonaise another day."

So she meets Philip again; and there is more than the bitterness of death in meeting him thus, in attendance on her fair foe and traducer.

CHAPTER XXVII.

A VELVET PAW.

"Oh, don't ask fifty questions of me all at once; my poor little head won't stand it," Mrs. Tollington pleads, shaking her fair hair, and fluttering, in her uncertainty, as to whether she shall assume the volatile, or the youthfully diffident and bewildered, air. "How can I tell you 'what it all means' in a minute? Olive! why don't you try and explain to Admiral Tollington—if you can—how you come to be here?"

The delicate blonde woman is quite herself as she utters this last sentence. She ceases the assumption of either the volatile or the youthfully diffident air. She is quite the spiteful elder woman, jealous of the way in which the younger fairer one has concentrated the interest of the two men upon herself in an instant.

"It would be difficult for me to explain why I'm here," Olive answers, bending her brows severely enough on her smiling foe. Then, with a change of expression as she resolves, "No, I won't tell him; fool as she is, she is his wife, and he was my father's friend," she says, aloud:

"I am happy enough here—try to believe that; I haven't patience enough to be a governess."

Admiral Tollington watches her keenly, and shakes his head. "I don't understand it," he says, with a sigh; and then Philip pushes nearer, and says to Olive:

"Won't you speak to me, Miss Aveland? have I quite faded from your mind?"

He endeavors to say this in a semi-playful way, and Mrs. Tollington suspects him vaguely, and Olive despises him for it. How can he pretend to be any other than he is to her; whoever may be standing by? What are these Tollingtons to him that he should address her as "Miss Aveland," and affect the airs of a mere every-day acquaintance. She looks him steadily in the face, and he flashes an imploring glance at her from between those lashes which so often curtain his real feelings; and she lets him take her hand.

"How should I forget you?" she asks, simply; and Mrs. Tollington gives a bitter little laugh.

"You have yet to learn, Mr. Fletcher, that Miss Aveland takes everything seriously: she always thinks more is meant than is said."

"My dear, where are you living?" Admiral Tollington asks. "I shall come and see you, and hear from you!"

"An elucidation of these mysteries," his wife interrupts. Then she passes out of the room with a bow, almost compelling her husband to go with her by placing her hand on his arm. And Olive stands back, proudly and angrily refusing to notice the hand which Admiral Tollington stretches out to her in passing.

In spite of the commanding, backward glance which Mrs. Tollington gives him, Philip lingers to say:

"Olive, say you're glad to see me."

"Why are you with that woman—that woman who was so cruel and insulting to me?" she says, chokingly.

"He's such a nice old fellow," Philip pleads. "Such a thoroughly honest, good old fellow. I'd drop her fast enough, but I like him too well."

Olive's head gives an impatient twitch.

"How long has he been home?"

"A week or ten days," Philip says, getting red; "he will be a good friend to us both," he adds. And then he tells Olive she will hear from him soon, clasps her hand once more, and follows his friends!

How bitter the girl is all the rest of that day. How she loathes herself—how she despises that element of fidelity in her nature which makes her cling to this debilitated hope that Philip will be true to her after all. But she can't help it. It is the strongest element in her nature; it is the master-passion of her life! If it were not, how happy and prosperous, and altogether successful, she might be.

It is her destiny to lose the worthy and love the unworthy, and seek to blind herself, and fail in doing so. And in this failure is the sting; for if she believed in Philip as thoroughly as she loves him, she would be the happiest woman in the world this night, instead of one of the saddest.

It is altogether unimportant, of course it is altogether unimportant, yet Olive tortures herself with futile conjectures as to why he "was with the Tollingtons." In her helpless, blind jealousy against anyone who keeps him from her, she is ready to accuse Admiral Tollington himself—her father's old friend—of being in league against her, of wishing to humiliate her, and generally to make her of no account. For he is "shorn of his strength by that nasty, affected Delilah," she thinks, angrily; and she hates Mrs. Tollington for her blonde locks and fair complexion, on which Time leaves no trace, and for her affected youthfulness, and for her apparent intimacy with Philip Fletcher. And in her solitude this night the memory of that meeting in the show-room rankles horribly, and she "has no friend to whom she can turn for solace and sympathy," she feels, in cruel forgetfulness of Griffiths Poynter, who is quite ready to bear the brunt of all her bitterness, provided she will rely on him as on a brother.

Meanwhile Philip is dining comfortably with the Tollingtons at the big, luxurious West-end hotel, where they are staying until it is settled at which port, Admiral Tollington's flag shall be hoisted—dining with them comfortably, and speculating with considerable amusement as to the special form of absurdity which his hostess will bloom into when she is such an acknowledged power in a port as its Admiral's wife.

The gallant, good, kind old sailor has had a hint from headquarters as to where his flag is to be unfurled, and, as may be supposed, he has given his wife a hint in turn. Accordingly, Mrs. Tollington speaks most unadvisedly about "When we go to Plymouth," and "When the Admiral and I give our first ball, I shall insist on your being at it." Philip accepts her invitations, which partake of the nature of a royal mandate, and despises her a little for "giving them in that way to a fellow who doesn't care for her," and dislikes her more than a little for having wounded Olive, his Olive!

A dozen packages arrive from a dozen different shops; for Mrs. Tollington is quite determined to hoist her flag with much splendor and pomp. In imagination she sees and hears people "taking her for Admiral Tollington's daughter," and she frames many prettily-worded sentences, by means of which to undeceive them. "Youth and I parted when I married, and how anyone can take me for Admiral Tollington's daughter now I can't imagine," is one of her pet phrases. But all the while she says it she tries to look seventeen, and flatters herself that she succeeds in doing so.

The new and brilliant plumage in which she is going to preen herself for her flight into the new fields claims her attention now, and so the two men are left to themselves. As her dress rustles richly out of sight, Admiral Tollington dashes right into the heart of the matter which is interesting them both.

"Why did Miss Aveland leave my wife?" he says. "I see you know!"

The impulse to tell the truth is upon Philip for an instant, but only for an instant. Then he checks it, as is his wont. He assails his conscience for so doing by telling himself that it is morally wrong to make ill feeling between man and wife. Further, he tells himself that he does not know what really transpired when Olive left Mrs. Tol-

lington's house in a rage. "Olive's temperament is always warm," he reminds himself, "and women always exaggerate matters of feeling. On the whole"—well, on the whole, he resolves to be strictly non-committal. It would be inexcusable on his part to make poor old Tollington uncomfortable, and Mrs. Tollington is really a very nice little woman. So he says:

"Miss Aveland is a very reserved girl, I think; and I understood at the time from Mrs. Tollington that the want of confidence in her on Miss Aveland's part distressed her; but I really know or remember very little about it."

"Do you think" (and now Admiral Tollington fixes a keener gaze than he has fixed before on the open and ingenuous countenance of his wife's new friend, that "charming Mr. Fletcher who had saved her life") "do you think there is any love-affair at the bottom of it? do you think any fellow has been playing fast and loose with Olive Aveland?"

He pushes the wine with some vehemence toward Philip as he asks this, and Philip nonchalantly fills his glass before he replies:

"I can't fancy any fellow being such a fool."

"Neither can I, sir; neither can I," the old sailor says, lashing himself into wrath at the bare supposition; "but something has gone wrong with Olive Aveland, and I'll find out what it is, and who it is; and the doer of it shall not go unpunished, though her father is dead."

Philip bows his head approvingly. The sentiment pleases him very well, for he likes to feel that Olive—Olive who loves him with such utter devotion—is properly appreciated by other people. He feels quite certain, too, that no unpleasant results to himself will attend Admiral Tollington's investigation. For Olive will be staunch, Olive will never betray him, or witness against him in any way. He feels almost complacent about his own conduct when he considers how it has won him the unswerving fidelity of such a one as Olive Aveland.

Wrapt in his own meditation concerning the change in the child of his old friend, Admiral Tollington becomes silent and self-absorbed. Therefore it is an agreeable change, presently, to go into the drawing-room and have tea poured out for him by the fair hands of Mrs. Tollington, Philip feels. She tries to be winningly gushing to her husband; but his attention is given rather to the evening paper than to her. So presently she makes a sign to Philip, and he goes and takes a low chair by the side of her sofa.

"I want to ask you something as a friend who has your interest very much at heart," she begins, in a very low tone; and Philip suppresses the laugh into which he is almost betrayed, and asks:

"What is it?"

"I could not bear to see you, the man who saved my life, fall a victim to any designing manoeuvre. Why did you stay behind when we came away from that shop to-day?"

"I staid to speak to Miss Aveland," he says, boldly, for it rather pleases him to see Mrs. Tollington grow flushed, and vexed, and confused, in her friendly eagerness to save him from every woman's toils. A few soft words will always bring Mrs. Tollington round again, and the speaking of soft words to women does not at all overtask Philip Fletcher.

"I thought so, I feared so. Oh, Mr. Fletcher, I shall speak to you as a sister might; I can't bear to think of you as trifling with anyone; and still less can I bear to think that you have any serious intentions about Miss Aveland. I have an instinct against her—I've had it from the first," and Mrs. Tollington tries hard to make a shudder, convulses her frame slightly as she finishes her sentence.

"Let us all talk of something pleasanter," the arch-hypocrite says; "let us talk of the laurels you will win as the Naval Queen of whatever port you're going to."

"Which means," she says, sharply, "let us leave Miss Aveland's name out of the conversation. Why are you so guarded about her? Why can't you bear to hear me speak the truth about her?"

Mrs. Tollington has unconsciously raised her voice while asking these questions, and to her annoyance, when she pauses for an answer, she sees her husband's eyes fixed upon her in undisguised

amazement. Philip sees this too; but he is neither annoyed nor perplexed. This is not the kind of thing that upsets Philip's equanimity.

"Ladies' instincts always amuse me," he says, slowly rising up and strolling over nearer to the lamp-lighted and journal-laden table; "my cousins have them to a great extent, and the people they abuse most frightfully at first generally turn out to be their bosom friends after a time"—

"And deceive them in the end," Mrs. Tollington interrupts. But Philip won't pursue the conversation with her. He picks up the *Times*, which Admiral Tollington has just thrown down, and, with a careless "Any news to-night sir?" begins to read it—leaving Mrs. Tollington with a feeling of being foiled, and of having shown her cards too openly.

Philip, sauntering away composedly to a small Bohemian club soon after this, little suspects that he is being arraigned at the bar of the Admiral's honest opinion, tried, and found wanting. He has scarcely made his adieux to the Tollingtons, and bowed himself out of the room, before the Admiral opens his battery upon that fair fortress, his wife.

"There's something about this new friend of yours that I don't like, my dear—something I don't like at all."

"But I have no new friends," the lady says, languidly leaning back, and putting her feet up on the sofa with an air that denotes extreme lassitude. Then she makes a bold stroke to disarm him.

"I was so glad to hear Mr. Fletcher say good-night; he might have seen an hour ago how wearied I was; but young men are so inconsiderate; because it pleased him to stay and talk to you"—

"It seemed to me that it pleased him to stay and talk to you," Admiral Tollington grunts. Not that he does himself or anybody else the injustice of disliking to see the wife he looks upon as young and pretty, and attractive, the recipient of attentions from men who are like unto her in that they are young and attractive, too; but he has a well-grounded and justifiable horror of any attempt being made to hoodwink him. And it certainly has appeared to him to-night that the low tones, and the lady's reproof to her guest, savor of greater intimacy than he had been told existed between the pleasant-looking pair.

Mrs. Tollington pulls the flimsy handkerchief with which she has been veiling her eyes from the light off her face, and placidly regards her husband.

"My dear," she says, in gentle, deprecating remonstrances, "you forget! he is not a new friend; it is some months since he saved my life at the peril of his own. Oh, that terrible day! don't let me speak about it," and Mrs. Tollington heaves a thrilling, sighing sob which she hopes will close the conversation.

"I can believe that the fellow is plucky enough," Admiral Tollington says, heartily. He would feel heartily grateful to any man, however much of a miscreant that man might be, who had saved Mrs. Tollington's life. But—yes, he can't help feeling that there is a "but" about this young man; and he can't resist the inclination to word his feeling.

"But he didn't speak out about Miss Aveland in a straight-forward way; I overheard your conversation with him, of course, my dear; and, moreover, I had been questioning him concerning the cause of her cutting herself adrift from you in the way she did. I fancied he knew something about it; and now I'm sure."

"Are you?" Mrs. Tollington says, faintly; "why—how?"

"He knows all about it," Admiral Tollington persists, clinging to the portion of the subject that is most interesting to himself, as it concerns Olive, and disregarding his wife's question. "He knows all about it; and he's too much of a sea-lawyer to answer me plainly; so, my dear, I must come to you for all the information you can give me about that poor child, whose father was as good a seaman and as gallant an officer as ever trod the quarter-deck. Many's the boat action and cutting-out expedition that poor Aveland and I have been in together," Admiral Tollington continues, with a lapse into the tenderly reminiscent frame of mind

that leaves him unprotected, and shows Mrs. Tollington where the weak places are in his armor.

"Do tell me about some of those exploits," she says, rousing herself up, and leaning on her elbow, and making her eyes sparkle with enthusiasm. "I have always been half crazy about naval adventures and anecdotes; I used to worry papa dreadfully to get him to tell me about the storms and engagements he had been in. Do you know papa got fifteen awful wounds in one action—a boat action I think it was—thirteen on one leg, and four on his back and shoulders, and two frightful ones on his head"—

"That makes nineteen! you said fifteen," Admiral Tollington interrupts. He is interested in the story of the mutilated condition of Mrs. Tollington's papa; but, above all things, he likes accuracy when dealing with facts!

"I made a mistake—it was nineteen," Mrs. Tollington replies, promptly. "How he lived through it was a marvel to everyone; the doctors said his tenacity of life was surprising."

"What was it in?" Admiral Tollington asks, paying the fair biographer the compliment of taking off his glasses, and settling himself near the fire to listen comfortably.

"Oh, a boat action!"

"But where?"

"Somewhere off the North American station," Mrs. Tollington answers, yawning. She has turned the edge of the sword—her admiral has forgotten Philip and Olive, and so her naval enthusiasm is waning fast.

"Never mind, never mind," Admiral Tollington says, complacently, nodding his head; "I'll look it out in 'James' Naval History' to-morrow; probably there is an honorable mention made of such an affair as that. I'll make an extract of it for you, my dear."

For a moment Mrs. Tollington permits herself to feel furious with her painstaking, practical spouse. Why will he persist in tracing things to their source? "It's utterly impossible," she feels, "to talk civilly and gracefully to a man who will have every lightly-mentioned detail authenticated." But having involved herself in a web, it behooves her to wriggle out of it; so she says:

"I dare say I have made more of it than it actually was—blundered, in some way or other. I was always so enthusiastic and imaginative that poor papa couldn't recognize his own stories, very often, when I told them back to him again. So I won't be disappointed, dear, if you don't bring me a very gratifying extract from 'James's History,' after all; but do tell me some of your escapes and adventures. I want to know all that you've ever done; I'm not one of the fashionably-cold, indifferent wives, dear, who know little and care less about the means by which their husbands have won distinction; tell me."

So she purrs upon him, making him believe that she is hungering to hear how he has fought, won, and made a name she is proud of.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

MISS WESTCOTT INTERVENES.

THE sun rises upon the first day of the "Winstaple week," and the Winstaple week is a period from which men date events in this border-land district. Two balls are given in it. The hunt ball, which is good, and the county ball, which is better, the privileged say, because it is so hedged in with patrician traditions and rules and regulations, that all respectable people who are not "county people" are miserable at it.

These balls belong rather to the order of Old World festivities. The potentates of the land drive in from long distances, and put up for two or three days at one or other of the ancient inns of the place, where they are treated to rather more ceremonial, and regarded with rather more outward awe, than falls to the lot of crowned heads traveling through the busier haunts of men nowadays.

The hunt ball is by far the gayer affair of the two, for it falls on the night of the day of the best meet of the season, and nearly the whole of the crowded field attend the ball at night. And they are all in most sportsman-like and justifiable high spirits, for the run has been a tremendous one, and one of the monarchs of Exmoor held out till he reached the very heart of Winstaple, where he

died like a king facing his foe. The prettiest Miss Westcott has the honor of being mentioned as the only lady out who rode well up the whole day, and was in at the death, after all. Ardent admirers of the chase are very much at the feet of this young Diana to-night. They are in ecstasies about her pluck and prowess. "It would have been nothing if it had been a quick thing," they say; "but it had been anything but a 'quick thing,'" and yet she and her horse came up fresh and full of anxiety at the finish. It is a full and sufficient proof that she knows what she is about in the saddle, and "doesn't go fooling about, and bucketing her horse to pieces for a show-off."

The fresh, fair, handsome, light-haired girl is the Queen of the Revels indisputably. In spite of the severe run through the biting air, she does not seem one whit fatigued, but is leaping through every round dance like a young leopardess. And her favorite and most frequent partner is Phil Fletcher—her cousin Ronald's tutor.

There is no guile about Miss Westcott, and unquestionably there is nothing secretive nor underhand. She tells Phil that she "likes dancing with him better than any of the rest," so openly and earnestly that Sir Galahad himself could have done no other than Phil does—namely, ask her again and again. The goddess of the chase doesn't mind his absorbed silence in the least. How can he talk, poor fellow, when all his attention is given to the grand entrance door through which it is possible Madge Roden may enter at any moment.

His good-tempered young partner takes a hearty interest in life all round, and so, though she hasn't the slightest objection to Phil's silence she wonders at the unwonted taciturnity, and can't help noticing the direction his eyes take perpetually. Presently she indicates a spot into which she desires to be propelled, in order to recover the breath which has ebbed away to the strains of the La belle Helene Waltz. As Fate wills it, this spot is near the door.

Certainly a handsome, striking girl is Miss Westcott. Rather redundant, perhaps, but not too much so for a big ball-room. Her bright crepe hair would look tangled and untidy, probably, if things about her were on a smaller scale. But as it is, fluffiness and puffiness predominates, and her hair only strikes one as being the most luxuriant in the room. Altogether, with her bright, laughing, upturned face, her tall, full figure, and that irrepressible air of hers, which is as natural to her as shining is to the sun, she is a very prominent figure in the ever-changing view of the ball-room. And the man who is most frequently by her side is handsome and distinguished.

"Are you looking for any one, Phil?" she asks, presently, when her breath has come back sufficiently to enable her to articulate. "Are you anxious about Ronald? My sister is keeping him out of mischief."

"I think when this waltz is over I'll look him up though," Phil answers; "a hunt dinner, and a hunt dance."

"To say nothing of so many pretty faces, may prove too much for Master Ronald's head, mayn't they?" she interrupts, laughingly. "What would my august aunt say if Ronald fell in love with some pretty unknown here to-night? she'd expire if she thought my sister indulged his boyish propensity to flirt; but if she married beneath him!—oh! poor Phil! you'd have a time of it."

Miss Westcott laughs out in genuine enjoyment of her own conceit as she says this, and in her exuberance of spirit places her hand on Phil's shoulder, and gives the signal for one more round, and they go off together, a handsome, much-observed pair.

She calls him "Phil" in mere thoughtlessness, as girls do so many things which they had better leave undone; and though he has never wished her to do it, it cannot be said that he actually dislikes it, for it drops with most friendly, and "nothing more," naturalness from Miss Westcott's tongue. So they swing round together, her draperies swirling out in the unflattering way that tells one that the "waltzers are waltzing in time," and with the same look of "zest" about her with which she had followed the hounds the whole day. And uninterested people look at them, and think "they're a fine-looking pair," and that is all.

But one interested person, who has come into the room just before this pair started from the door-way, just in time to hear that last sentence of the young lady's, "Poor Phil! you'd have a time of it," stands still, heart smitten at once, though she knows it not herself, by the words and the sight.

To other people Phil and Miss Westcott are a pair of ordinary good-looking mortals; and that they should dance a great deal together, and that the girl should call him "Phil," are matters of very little moment to anybody. But to this newcomer they mean so much! Madge Roden feels instinctively that the large blonde with ruffled hair—who addresses him familiarly by his Christian name—is the special Miss Westcott at whose feet Philip affirmed his cousin to be—the same whose clever riding to-day is the theme of the hour.

Miss Roden, senior, and the Hendersons are close by her, and Madge can't help wondering whether or not they heard the words that will go on ringing in her ears—whether or not they are noticing the air of intimacy which is the only thing she sees in this brilliantly-lighted room? Before she can solve these doubts a variety of men are undulating before her, programmes and pencils in hand, and Madge has pledged herself for all the best dances before she realizes that by so doing she has cut herself off from all chances of having a few quiet words with Phil.

The waltz ends, and the waltzers either patrol solemnly well in view of their seniors, or vanish into some kindly obscurity, where every whispered word is not noticed and commented upon by the many who have had their day, and are grievously pained to see others having it. We who are in the sere, we who are waning, can well understand the feeling, and ought to be lenient to it. All the glory of a "ball" is over for a woman when men no longer jostle one another in their haste to secure her for so many dances. There comes, indeed, later on, a time of fuller and more perfect triumph than we could ever have known in our self-absorbed youth; and that is when our daughters take the field!

Madge is sitting down; her dress—a French combination of blue velvet and blue tulle (composed in such a way that beholders wonder that they haven't always thought "velvet proper ball-room wear for a girl") half concealed by the ample trains of laces of her aunt and Mrs. Henderson, who are on either side of her—her face wholly concealed by the rather massive figure of the member for the division of the county, who is to be her partner in the ensuing gallop. But though she can not be seen, she can see—and hear!

Distinct from the tramp of the multitude, she hears one voice; and she loses the whole gist of an intelligent remark that the aforesaid member is making to her, in her anxiety to hear what that voice says:

"I shall try to get Ronald away when I've found your mamma for you; the long run and this hot room have been too much for the boy's head."

"Nonsense!" the Diana of the day responds promptly; "the boy's head isn't worth thinking about if it can't stand a long run and a hot room; look at me."

Phil laughs, and utters some meaningless, semi-gallant words, that are accepted by the girl herself, and by uninterested listeners around her, as Society's small verbal change. But they are not so accepted by Madge. Phil has found his fate in this big, rather boisterous blonde! She is sure of it; and so she makes a struggle to magnanimously consider Miss Westcott "a very fine, handsome girl."

Simultaneously, she perceives that Mrs. Henderson and Phil have recognized one another, and that Phil is advancing to speak to that lady. The next moment Madge is shaking hands with him herself, and the next she is whisked off by her partner, for the gallop has begun: and then, as Miss Westcott is claimed and carried off, Phil forgets his anxiety about his pupil, and places himself between Aunt Lucy and Mrs. Henderson.

The memories of her parting scene, and her parting injunctions to the young fellow, are very present with Mrs. Henderson as he sits down and asks her eagerly for "news." She knows what he wants to hear. She knows that the rumor of

the breaking off of Madge's engagement has gone abroad, and that he is asking to have it verified. But she has scorched his fingers once, and she will be very chary how she fans love-flames in the future.

But she answers him very gently:

"News! my dear boy, if I gave you my news what a bore you would think me! it would be all about the village joys, and woes, and clubs. Tell me news, rather; tell me about your mother and sisters."

"They are quite well," he answers, coolly, for he considers that she is repelling him unjustly. So he turns to Aunt Lucy.

"How well Miss Roden is looking," he says.

"Yes," Aunt Lucy answers, hurriedly, thinking of the fever this young man's imprudence brought upon her beloved niece, and wishing, with all her heart, that there were no young men in the world to upset existing and agreeable arrangements. "Yes, poor dear child; she was sadly shattered by that terrible affair, and it will leave its traces on her for life, I fear;" and Aunt Lucy gathers her garments more closely about her, and fans herself vigorously, as though she would put the remains of the fever to flight by that means. And Phil feels strangely downcast; for he thinks that the "terrible affair" to which Aunt Lucy alludes with such ireful impatience, is the breaking off of the engagement with his cousin.

"But it's past and over now," Mrs. Henderson puts in, kindly, for she too is thinking of Madge's illness, "and we'll agree never to speak of it again. Who is that fine-looking-girl you were dancing with when we came in, Phil?"

"Miss Westcott, the cousin of my pupil."

"Oh!" Mrs. Henderson says her "Oh!" so significantly that Philip blushes with annoyance, as he feels that Mrs. Henderson is thinking what is not the case. Before he can master this annoyance, and say something coolly critical about Miss Westcott that shall undeceive his hearers, the gallop comes to a clattering end, and Madge is restored to her place.

Now is his time, and he seizes it. He pleads with an eagerness he can't subdue for the next dance—for any—for one at least. And Madge has to shake her head, and declare herself "engaged for all."

He looks round hopelessly, wondering whether anyone of the men who have so unwarrantably stolen a march on him will have the decent feeling to renounce her to him. And Madge meanwhile looks down and plays with her programme as it dangles from her fan, and wonders whether or not Phil will "arrange it," with some one to whom a dance with her will be but as water unto wine, compared to what it will be to Phil.

But he does not read the truth in her face, and so the opportunity slips, as does many a prized one from us all in life, and Madge gets into a vortex of the other men; and for all the good Phil gains from her society, he might have staid away from the hunt ball this night.

But there comes a moment when an unwary man leaves her on a fruitless errand after her cloak, in which she wants to wrap herself as she proceeds down to supper. And in that moment Phil is by her side.

"I want to hear you say that you forgive me everything that happened the last time I saw you," he says, eagerly; "and I want you to tell me if the friendship I so proudly thought I had gained then is to be withdrawn from me altogether now."

"I have nothing to forgive—if I had, I'd do it; and as for the rest, everything is altered, you know; and so, perhaps, we had better not try to go on building up, when the very foundation of what we built upon is broken down."

She hardly knows why she says this. She is only certain that she wishes him to know that Philip and herself have severed their bonds, and that she will not hastily form another bond, even of friendship. So she dispirits and unwittingly deceives him.

Still he follows her down, and gets close to her at supper, and is preparing to try to touch once more the old spring of interest in himself—to wake the chords that have made the only music of his life, when Miss Westcott and a boy partner, who bores her, take up a position next to him.

Miss Westcott is really "fond of Phil Fletcher."

She would use these very words in speaking of him to anyone, use them openly, and believe in very truth that they exactly expressed her unsentimental regard for him. We know little of ourselves, even the most self-analytically disposed of us.

She is frank to a fault, this boisterous young being with the blonde hair, and so now, directly she finds herself next to Phil, who never bores her, she audibly expresses her delight, for she will be able to get away from the boy who does. And Madge listens to the effusive words that bespeak such well-grounded intimacy, and that so fatally confirm the statement Philip had made about his cousin being awfully gone on one of these girls. Listens, and lets the scorn in her heart for the facility with which people love and unlove, and for the fickleness of herself and others, display itself in her averted face and her cool manner.

"I knew you wouldn't go, Phil," Miss Westcott begins; "I felt sure of you for the after-supper round dances; they're always the best, and we always belong to each other for them, don't we?"

Madge tingles. She does not know that this remark is made by Miss Westcott for the purpose of ridding herself for the rest of the night of her youthful attache, in whose mind calf-love had just developed the knowledge that he is, as his sisters have often told him, "but an awkward hobbledohoy." Poor fellow! He too has his strictly private miseries, even as he stands here smiling the uneasy loose kind of smile, that will not limit itself, of indecision and awkwardness. He has suddenly become conscious of so many things of which he had been happily oblivious. He knows that he has nothing to say for himself—nothing, that is, that a girl can care to hear; he knows that the line of scarlet flesh between his cuff and his glove, which won't keep buttoned, is a hideous thing in woman's eyes. He knows that when he flops about in a gallop, or conducts himself like a surging wave in a waltz, that his partner must think him a mere bungling boy. He could almost have cried just now when he found himself panting, and heard himself puffing, after two sharp rounds, at the end of which Diana's breathing powers were in as perfect order as when they started. He is nineteen, and Ronald Westcott is only nineteen, but Miss Westcott's young adorer knows well that neither she nor any other woman would venture to treat Ronald with the mixture of familiarity and unconcern with which they treat himself. He can't understand it, and he is miserable, even as he stands bearing the burden of Miss Westcott's fan and bouquet (he has sent her the bouquet himself), and handkerchief, and wine-glass, while that young being calmly disposes of her mayonnaise and gives all her attention to Phil Fletcher.

Presently Madge feels that Miss Westcott is whispering to Phil. She cannot hear a word; she would not hear a word if she could. But she is annoyed at the mere fact; and it must be conceded that she is unwarrantably annoyed, for has she not done her best to chill him off to-night?

"Who's the pretty girl in blue?" Miss Westcott asks—"bewitching dress, too; how well it would suit me!" Not the least of the young Diana's charms is her open and undisguised pleasure in her own appearance. You cannot call it vanity.

"It is Miss Roden," Phil mutters, fervently hoping that Madge will not hear him.

"Oh! the one who was engaged to your cousin; a shame to have broken with such a nice fellow;" and now she addresses the youthful victim of her bow and spear aloud, "Mr. Mervyn, may I ask you to go and see where mamma is? I won't wander about in search of her till I know exactly where she is."

He feebly shakes his chains.

"Shall I find you here again if I do go?"

"Well, yes, you'll find me if my partner has not claimed me," she says, blithely; and as he goes on her mission, she turns to Phil, and laughs out unguardedly.

"Under the circumstances, I don't suppose it will be very shocking if I ask you to take a turn or two with me, Phil. I can't stand that boy any longer." And she rises as she says it, and Phil is obliged to go off with her, without another word from Madge, without even a look.

The circumstances to which Miss Westcott had so carelessly referred are simply these: that he has been living in her father's house for many weeks; that they are as intimate as brother and sister; and that they dance together nearly every night. But Madge feels sure that by "under the circumstances" "that overpowering girl" means their engagement. And the glory of the ball is gone.

She goes rather languidly through the rest of her engagements, but still she finds greater pleasure—no! not pleasure, but greater peace—in dancing than in sitting down; for she is shrinkingly afraid of the remarks that may fall from Aunt Lucy and Mrs. Henderson. Everything connected with the one subject has stood out in such vivid colors before Madge this night, that she thinks the others must have seen it also. Naturally she has no admiration left for Miss Westcott. But she could ill bear to hear Phil's choice criticised by those two friends of hers.

At length she makes the very young lady-like plea to her partner of requiring change of air, and indicates a wish to go out into one of the bench-lined corridors and sit down, out of the whirl. She feels that she may do this with impunity, for her partner is that same Mr. Mervyn who is wearing his heart upon his sleeve for Miss Westcott. Madge knows well that there will be no trouble with him. She has not "ridden to hounds all day, and come as fresh as paint to the ball to-night," as he enthusiastically describes Miss Westcott having done. And she is right. All his soul is with the young Diana of the day, though his body reposes upon the hard bench at Madge's side.

Presently she begs him "not to stay with her, but to get another partner and finish it." And this she does really in mercy to the boy, who keeps on craning his neck to look through the door-way at the gyrating form of his love's youngdream. He obeys her with an obedient haste that he is heartily ashamed of, but that he is quite powerless to repress. The fact is, he has stimulated himself to the point of determining to "put it to the test," this night. His hand, heart, and possessions will be offered to Miss Westcott before the "lights are dead, the garlands shed," in the waxing light of day.

Wearily Madge sits there alone, her eyes fixed on the changing figures, but not seeing one of them. Suddenly the seat by her side is taken, and Phil Fletcher asks:

"I have watched for this moment to find you disengaged; do give me a turn."

"I have dismissed my partner on the plea of being too tired to dance any more," she says, evasively, and Phil lowers his head and pleads.

"Not with me, as a proof to me that you haven't altogether ceased to take a little friendly interest in me?"

"Friendly interest! Under the circumstances, even that is impossible."

For an instant he harbors the delusion that the girl loved Philip too well to endure any communication with Philip's relations now. Then he banishes it, and is about to say something which shall prove to her, at least, that his interest in her is deeper than ever, when again Miss Westcott intervenes.

This time she comes flying up with real dismay on her face, and does not even see Madge. "Dear Phil," she begins, "do come; Ronald has taken too much wine, I'm afraid, and he's broken a big looking-glass; papa can't manage him."

It was true. Ronald and a big cavalry sword, with which he had been practicing a little harmless fencing, were the innocent means of deepening Madge's conviction of Phil being Mrs. Westcott's "dear Phil" in very truth. "I will be back directly," are his parting words as he goes off in search of his charge; and even at the door he turns round and gives her a look that plainly entreats her to "wait for him."

CHAPTER XXIX.

"HOPE TELLS A FLATTERING TALE."

For three woefully expectant days Olive Aveland has endured the suspense—now she simply lives through it. All of us know the difference that exists between these two passive forms of misery, or, if we have not learned it already, we

shall learn it by-and-by. But I believe that the last-named stage is, in reality, the stagnant period that must intervene before the death of any great suffering.

The fourth day dawns, and, as Olive raises herself and prepares for the day, the wicked prayer is on her lips that she "may not live to see another." In that same moment she is helped and forgiven; for the prayer that she utters, which really comes from her heart, is "she may live to know how wise it all is."

"Oh, happiness! our being's end and aim." What servile misery we all go through in seeking to make you our own familiar friend. And you shun us the more determinately, the more we pursue you, and force upon us the conviction that you are very much like the denizens of this wicked world, after all—never accessible to those who really need you.

No letter from Philip rests on her breakfast-table, throwing a halo over it. Her rather dry bread and butter nearly chokes her as she tries to begin that "crushing out" system which she has half-vowed to carry through. He is free, and he does not use his freedom to come near her. "If he does not seek me, I will not let my life be laid waste by thoughts of him any longer," she says in her heart, with fierce determination.

Weak, weak, "as the first that fell of woman-kind," as she is, she does really make strong and earnest efforts, all this day, to forget that this man lives, corroding her life! She endeavors, with all her power of argument, to prove to herself that he is a commonplace character enough, selfish, and not too largely endowed with principle. She accepts the truth of the statements she makes to herself concerning him, and loves him just as well as if she disbelieved them all.

Olive, in short, belongs to that order of women—and it is not a small one, unfortunately—who do not fall in love with the good qualities of men. Women of this type detect the "one virtue" (overlaid as it may be by a thousand crimes), and justify their affection by it. Or they fail in detecting any virtue at all, and still love the poor sinner out of very pity.

As she goes into her lodgings this night, she tells herself that henceforth Philip's reign over her heart shall be a secret and unacknowledged one. He shall never have the satisfaction of feeling that he may leave her for any length of time and always be sure of a welcome when it pleases him to come. "Good-bye, my dear dead hope," she says; "I've not even you left to me in the world now." And as she so resigns herself, he comes across the room to her.

These three days, that have been so desperately long, and full of painful uncertainty to Olive, have been days of temptation and struggle to Philip. He knows what Olive does not realize—that it would be a greater cruelty, on his part, to marry her than to part with her at once and forever. He knows that poverty with a wife and children, however much he loved them, would brutalize him. And he knows that, being what he is, he has no reasonable hope of ever emerging out of poverty by his own exertions. Further, he knows that in the presence of the girl all this knowledge is likely to prove vain.

So, for three days, he has been struggling against his inclination to be soothed by a sight of the one being in the world to whom he is the first and the dearest. But a sight of her woe-lined face, as she went to work this morning (he has waited for an hour each day to see her come out), has toppled down his resolution. And so behold him here at the eleventh hour!

Here as her friend only, not as her lover. He has sworn solemnly to himself that nothing shall tempt him to the injustice of being more than calmly friendly with Olive Aveland. He has some vain and feeble notion "that, in turn, her own good sense will tell her that it is folly for them never to see one another; and to be apparently at feud, though marriage is out of the question."

He never pauses to consider, as he himself will not be injured by the arrangement, that it is one to ruin Olive, in people's estimation. There will be comfort to him in her society. What does it matter to Philip at what cost to the girl this comfort is purchased?

"I should have called on you before," he glibly

and falsely explains, as soon as they have shaken hands coldly, "but I've been looking about to find employment." Then, as Olive vouchsafes no answer, does not even look at him, he goes on; "My prospects have altered very much since I saw you last; do you know in what way?"

She turns her face toward him now, and it is steady as a rock as she says:

"I have heard from Madge Roden."

"Then you know that my engagement with her is broken off?"

"Yes," Olive says. "Why?"

She is hungering for him to say, "Because I love you, Olive." But he is a wise young man. Such a speech would mean a wedding-ring very soon; and, very soon after that, all the subtleties, and woes, and petty miseries of a ten pound householder. So he sagaciously does violence to his inclinations, which would lead him to make the very speech Olive is vainly imagining, and answers instead:

"Miss Roden grew tired of me, I suppose."

"I can hardly think that of Madge," she says, slowly; "she is such a faithful-hearted girl. 'It is human, I suppose, to value a thing more highly when we have lost it; there was a time when you certainly did not duly prize Madge Roden or her love.'"

"Don't you reproach me for that, Olive," he cries, quickly. Then he feels that these words may be taken as the advanced guard of a whole regiment of "follies," if he does not neutralize their impression, and adds:

"To be perfectly candid with you" (how natural it is to distrust the veracity of words that are prefaced in this way) "I did not value what I have lost highly enough until I lost it: but I'm making up for that careless appreciation now. You mustn't be hard on me, Olive; I have a horrible feeling of isolation upon me; my own people have cooled considerably toward me of late, and, if they hadn't, I am not sufficiently pleased with my cousin Phil's conduct to risk meeting him. If it were not for the Tollingtons and—you," he says, hesitatingly, "I should be as solitary a fellow as there is in London."

Again there is silence on Olive's part. She is most profoundly perplexed by Philip's manner and his words. But, in the midst of her cruel perplexity, she stands fast to her determination to make no sign that shall show him she is still his to torture as he likes. That he will torture her horribly she knows; but he shall not know it.

"Admiral Tollington is coming to see you," he presently jerks out; "how fond he seems of you, Olive."

A softer look—one of gratitude—gleams in Olive's eyes—poor, tear-stiffened eyes, that have been for many a long day set in circles of pain—and she says, warmly:

"I'm glad he is coming; I hope he won't bring that woman with him."

"Do you mean Mrs. Tollington?"

"Of course I mean Mrs. Tollington; Philip, I hate her!"

"She's a good little creature enough, too," he says, deprecatingly. "Frivolous and a little vain, perhaps, but not a person to call such a passion as hate into existence, any more than she is one to call such a passion as love into existence."

He throws this last sentence as a sop to the Cerberus of Olive's animus. Instead of being appeased by it, however, Olive is aggravated into saying:

"Love! don't speak of anything so holy as 'love' in connection with such a creature as that," and she lets go her lax hold of the slender rope of dignity in a moment. Then she checks herself, and adds, more moderately:

"I'm neither generous nor just, I know it very well, when that woman is my topic, Philip. She did not wrong and misjudge me through obtuseness and stupidity; she did it with low cunning and carefully regulated spite. But you're right; she is not a person to call such a passion as hate into existence. For the future I'll only despise her—as I don't despise anything else on earth," she winds up, vehemently.

"She's not worth talking about," Philip is beginning, but Olive interrupts him by saying, calmly:

"Don't shelve the subject in that way; I should like it better if you said, 'Mrs. Tollington is a

friend of mine, and I won't stay here and hear her abused.'"

"And you would take advantage of that rash threat, and would go on abusing her, in order to rid yourself of my society?" he questions, laughingly. "Oh, yes! I know what women are."

"You know what women are!" she repeats, with infinite scorn—infinite, assumed scorn, that is, for her heart is melting to his looks and tones with ignominious speed. "You know what women are! do you really think you do? Why, you know nothing about them; you only understand shallow, puerile natures like Mrs. Tollington's."

She is so ashamed of herself for having fallen back upon this unworthy subject of dispute, that she hastens to create a diversion directly the words are out of her lips, by making tea and offering Philip some. But Philip is not like Griffiths Poynter, who would have swallowed boiling water if offered to him by her fair hand. Philip detests tea at the hour when civilized man should be dining. He reminds himself that the Tollingtons—that "hospitable little woman, who has given him a general invitation, and her husband"—will be sitting down to a dinner that would be more appetizing to the lady certainly if partaken of in company with some one besides her legal lord. And he has risen and said "Good-evening" to Olive before he remembers that he dares not present himself, an unbidden guest, to the Tollingtons in morning dress. Still he goes, for there is nothing in Olive's manner to detain him.

Days pass and lengthen into weeks, and Philip continues calling on her fitfully, and making himself and his poor prospects his chief topics. His hand lingers longer and longer in giving the greeting and parting clasp. He defers to her opinion as to the way in which he shall go to work in trying to procure remunerative employment. And finally, he rushes to tell her of his first success with a return of all his old affectionate ardor, when he has secured the post of private secretary and amanuensis to Admiral Tollington.

"Old Tollington is to be knighted for the promptitude with which he resented something or other that was supposed to be an insult to the British flag. Olive you must let me write to you constantly, if it's only to tell you how Lady Tollington handles her sceptre and wears her crown."

"You may write to me as often as you will, Philip," Olive says, her eyes glistening; but if you ever mention that woman, I'll burn your letter without reading it."

CHAPTER XXX.

MISS WESTCOTT "THINKS."

Phil's whisper to Madge is perfectly audible to her. Unluckily—as she feels—it is perfectly audible to Miss Westcott also. Phil, making off to discharge a duty that his conscience tells him has been too long neglected, leaves the two girls almost alone together, for the few saunterers in the corridors are strangers to them both. For a moment Madge thinks that she will get up and walk away without a word; but she remembers in time that such a proceeding will have the air of fleeing before the face of the enemy. So she remains quiescent, and can think of nothing easy to say that may break the spell of silence naturally.

After some time, during which Madge has felt that she is lowering her flag considerably, and that many of those about her must know why she so pertinaciously refuses to dance, though she stays on, Phil comes up breathless from the exertions he has used in subduing his pupil's riotous spirits. His face lights up as he notices the irrepressible "welcome" that beams from her eyes at sight of him; and the way in which he offers her his arm, and she instantly takes it, suggests to lookers-on a previous understanding.

"You did wait," he says gratefully, as he hurries her on to a clearer corner; "how good of you!"

"It was the commonest civility, as you asked me to do it," she answers; and then she nerves herself to add, "I wanted to tell you that I hope you will be very happy."

There is broad amazement in his face as he bends down to look at her.

"Thank you; but what calls forth the hope just now?"

"She seems to be a very nice girl," Madge goes on, nearly choking over each word—congratulating a man one loves on his engagement to another woman is not the pleasantest thing in life—a very nice girl indeed. I hope I shall know her better by-and-by."

"What are you talking about?" he interrupts.

"About Miss Westcott, of course!"

"Ah! yes, she is a very nice girl," he says, carelessly, looking round him as he speaks for a spot where they will not be jostled by the wild waltzers.

"Perhaps they're engaged privately, and he doesn't wish to speak about it; well! if that's the case, the young lady should be a little more discreet," Madge thinks, resentfully, little knowing that discretion and Miss Westcott will never have anything to do with one another; and by this time Phil has selected his spot, and is conveying her to it. And once more they are comparatively speaking, isolated and far from observation. As soon as they stand still, he asks:

"Shall I meet with a welcome if I come to Halsworthy?"

"Yes; and so you will if you come to Moorbridge House," Madge responds, promptly, though she is thinking, the while, "how odious it will be if he rides over with that overpowering girl, and expects me to admire her feats of noble horsemanship."

"Then I shall come," Phil says, gravely and steadily; "it was for this that I asked you to wait. Perhaps I am not justified in what I have done, under all circumstances; perhaps I have taken unwarrantable liberty, as you make no sign of wishing to continue on friendly terms with me; tell me? Have I?"

"How can he dare to suppose that his engagement makes any difference in my feelings toward him!" Madge thinks, angrily; and her anger makes her tone cold and her words tart.

"You forget that I have had no opportunity of making such a sign; however, now I tell you, I shall be very glad to see you if I'm at home when you visit Mrs. Henderson; and now I must release Aunt Lucy, if you please."

Her words and manner damp him dreadfully; he leads her to her friends, cloaks her, takes her to her carriage in glum, unhappy silence. He considers that she has pointedly expressed to him her desire that they should be on merely friendly terms, and these are not nearly sufficient to content him as he thinks of her and her pleasant beauty and sweetness.

Altogether the hunt ball is a failure as far as these two young people are concerned; but it has been one of long-continued triumph to Miss Westcott.

The Westcotts are going to stay in Winstaple until after the county ball, which is to take place two days after the hunt ball. The Westcotts' home life is easy and unfettered enough; but they seem to revel in greater freedom still, now that they are staying away, with all the conditions of their daily life altered. Miss Westcott makes her own arrangements at the hunt ball, and informs her friends what they (the arrangements) are the next morning at breakfast.

"We shall be out nearly all day, mamma," she begins; "we arranged a riding party last night to start at eleven this morning."

"Who is going?" Phil asks.

"Why, you, of course, and six other men, and my sister and myself."

"Are you the only ladies?"

"Happily, we are," Miss Westcott laughs out, merrily.

"I shall not be able to go at eleven, for I shall be engaged with Ronald till long after that."

"My dear Phil, I'll wait till one rather than go without you!"

It is a bright, crisp winter day, and the atmosphere has an exhilarating effect on Miss Westcott. "I do like this kind of thing," she said, in a glow; "riding through villages that we don't know the names of—that we've never seen before, and probably shall never see again—I do like it; don't you?"

"Yes," Phil answers, hesitatingly; "but I think—why, surely, yes, I have seen this one before."

"We are in the High Street of Halsworthy," one of the men in advance shouts back. And then they both remember the place, and the occasion of their former visit to it.

"We drove your cousin and you once to Moorbridge House, to be sure, and regarded him as the master of it almost; how *could* that girl break it off! I do think it cruel; don't you, Phil?"

"I know nothing of the circumstances of the case," he says, tersely. "I only know that she is incapable of cruelty."

"It's such a charming old house, full of carvings and pictures, and all sorts of queer old things," Miss Westcott explains to anyone who will listen to her; "we had such a jolly lunch there, when Mr. Fletcher did the honors to us. Look here, Phil," she adds, suddenly; "why shouldn't we call on Miss Roden now?"

"Such a party of us," Phil protests, a thrill of utter aversion to the plan she has mooted possessing him. But Miss Westcott is pertinacious.

"The size of the party is nothing against our going. I should be delighted to see a regiment ride up to our house any day—and every day—as far as that goes; and I do want to see if she's quite in harmony with her house; besides, we're neighbors; we ought to call; give me a pencil, and I'll write mamma's name on my card—and please make haste."

Unwillingly enough he gives her the pencil; but he cannot prevent Miss Westcott from calling on anyone she pleases—he realizes this truth perfectly. As he returns his pencil to his pocket, he says:

"Ronald and I will ride on."

"If you do, I shall think you very unkind; and surely Miss Roden will think it very impolite, when I tell her that you came actually to her gates, and wouldn't come in."

"You wouldn't tell her?"

"Yes, I would, Phil; I shall be vexed enough to say anything, if you don't come. I ought to call, you know," she adds, persuasively, "because when we were left together last night we quite made friends."

It is Miss Westcott's happy idiosyncrasy to believe invariably that she quite "makes friends" with everyone she meets; and, as a rule, she is justified in her belief.

Carried by her eloquence, or her will, or by some unknown force in his own nature which he cannot gainsay, Phil rides on into the grounds of Moorbridge House—rides on in front with brilliant Miss Westcott; and the rest of the cavalcade follow them along the avenue.

Madge has staid at home all this morning. It is in vain that her aunt has impressed upon her at brief intervals that there is nothing like a brisk walk for wearing off fatigue. Madge declares that she is not in the least fatigued, and that therefore the walk would be a work of supererogation. She does not even go down to the village. She does not even go to the big pond that is frozen over, and which is out of sight of the house. "And all the winter you've been wishing for a good frost that you might have some skating!" Aunt Lucy complains, pathetically.

Phil has asked her for a welcome, and she has promised him one; and after a night's meditation, she is not sorry for it. No false shame shall keep her from giving him a full and hearty one whenever he comes; and something tells her he will come to-day.

She and her golden greyhound, and her three peacocks, as they strut round her for food, make a bright picture enough on the terrace. Madge is in a green velvet (that gleams like an emerald when the sun shines on it) and beaver-skin to-day; and in her Tyrolean hat one metallic-looking feather glistens. She is all warmth and light as she hears the sound of horses' feet. She looks up with a face fair as the day and rosy as the morn, and sees Phil and Miss Westcott riding toward her.

CHAPTER XXXI.

"WHO LOVES—YET DOUBTS."

MADGE makes no sign of being punished by the spectacle advancing at a hard canter toward her. She is punished horribly; but she is as game as one of her own Exmoor red deer, or as one of the best hounds that are always hungering for the destruction of the aforesaid red deer. There is no shadow of the exquisite pain at her heart, tingling either her face or her manners, as she quietly frees herself from the greyhound and the peacocks that

are parading around her, and advances to offer greetings to her guests.

She takes her guests into the room where her own portrait hangs, and where Aunt Lucy is sitting.

"Aunt," she says, as Phil goes up to shake hands with the old lady, "Mr. Fletcher and his friends will lunch with us presently;" and while Aunt Lucy is still writhing under this intelligence, for her gloomy imagination foresees more love-making, more engagements, and, finally, more abrupt and inexplicable terminations to the same; while she wrestles unsuccessfully with these dark, prophetic pangs, Madge carries her visitors off to the "observatory" in a whirl, from which she does not dare to cease.

"It would be odious to fall flat because—some one has done something I never thought he would do," Madge tells herself; but all the while she is taking Miss Westcott's measure most accurately, and cannot find that young lady deserving mentally of her friend Phil. "She would do so well for Griff," Madge thinks; "why won't the right people come together?"

The "observatory," as it is euphemistically called at Moorbridge House, is simply a square planked surface, guarded by wide-apart rails, and protruding from one of the shelving sides of the house. The ascent to it is by a wide, flat-stepped ladder outside the house. Altogether it is a perilous-looking place, fragile and steep; and as such, Miss Westcott feels disinclined to scale it. "I think—I don't care for views," she says, in a tone that is both deprecating and explanatory. "I don't care for views, and I get giddy if I go up ladders; so don't mind me."

She shouts this to Madge, who is already halfway up the "look-out," or observatory; and Madge smiles a bland assent, and graciously continues to lead the way for those whose love of scenery or sensation will take them up to one of the best artificial "look-outs" in this boundary land. It is not until she gains the summit that she realizes that she is alone here with Phil; that all the rest have elected to remain below with their liege lady of the hunt.

She commences doing the honors in a hurried manner, that is neither polite nor politic, for it proves her ill at ease; and Phil all the while is most mournfully self-possessed—like one unto whom Fate has done her worst.

Madge turns from side to side, and airily indicates everything, or rather, endeavors to indicate everything that is within their range of vision. And Phil doubles her difficulties by abstractedly gazing at her, and her only.

Presently the frosty air, and the tension of her nerves, causes a perceptible shiver to run through her frame, which she tries to explain away by drawing back abruptly from the rail she has been leaning against, and saying:

"Awful a fall would be from here down into that knobby, stony court-yard."

"Are you getting giddy?" he asks, coming a step nearer to her.

"No, but cold; and whenever I'm cold, I'm depressed: let us go down."

"I am giddy with a vengeance," he says, making a movement to stop her; "the air has intoxicated me, I suppose, given me the false, futile courage to tell you that I love you, Miss Roden, though I'm not mad enough to ask you to love me in return."

He ceases; and Madge stands, her head slightly raised, though her eyes are bent down, in order to avoid a gaze whose ardor she believes to be an insult to her. He can dare to tell her this, while the girl to whom he is engaged is at the foot of the ladder, waiting for them. Farewell the cherished romance! Indeed, he is as far from being the realization of her high ideal as was his cousin. Her inward cry must still be, "He cometh not"—the high-souled, honest lover she had taught herself to wait for.

It never enters her mind that it is the view he is having of the extent of the territory over which she reigns which has impressed him with a sense of his own madness in letting himself love her. Madge is a thorough woman; she is so much more to herself than her fat, productive acres are to her. She likes being the lady of the land; but above all things, she is Madge.

There is a very brief pause, but it seems a long

one to the young man, who is conscious of his own presumption, not to put the most humiliating interpretation on her silence. Then she says—and her heart does ache to have to say it:

"You must be giddy, indeed. I am more hurt than I can tell you, that you should have thought so lowly of me—and yourself, as to have said that; for I did hope to keep friends with you."

The sensation which may be supposed to have beset the bold page who loved the king's daughter, set in strongly in Phil's breast. He had not anticipated such a crushing rebuff as this, though he had told himself repeatedly that he had "no hope."

"And now have I forfeited your friendship?"

She tries to lash herself into anger in order that she may not break down and feebly cry over the downfall of her belief in his being better, and nobler, and truer altogether, than any other man.

"Yes, you have," she says, distinctly; "you know, all things considered, that your words were an insult; how could you dare to talk of love to me—situated as you are?"

"How could I, indeed. I am punished very properly; Miss Roden, you have given me a sharp lesson; be assured, I shall not offend again."

They have succeeded in perfectly bewildering and mystifying one another, and they both go down smarting and tingling with mortification. "That he should think so badly of me as to believe I'd let another girl's lover talk of loving me," Madge thinks. "That she, of all girls in the world should come down and crush me with the facts of my position, and pennilessness, and presumption," poor Phil feels. And he hates beaming, bright, boisterous Miss Westcott for having brought him into this valley of degradation, forgetting that he would have come alone if she had not captured him, and tied him to her chariot wheel.

As far as the two chief actors in the piece are concerned, it moves along very heavily after this. Phil is sick with mortification and disappointment. Madge is shattered by this rude awakening from her day-dream. The others, to be sure, are perfectly at their ease, and seem well able to enjoy their luncheon, in spite of that abstraction on Madge's part which renders her all at once a limp and inefficient hostess.

His parting words, uttered in haste, but coming, as they do, straight from his heart, wring her horribly, both for him and for herself. Unluckily, they only confirm her in her previous belief.

"Forgive me," he says; "I only remembered that you were a woman to be won, and that I was a man who might win; you have made me repent my want of memory bitterly enough."

"Not more than I do," she answers, softened in spite of her sense of outrage; "it has shocked me more than I can tell you."

And with these words of doom and dismissal ringing in his ears, he rides away from Moorbridge House by Miss Westcott's side.

By the day of the county ball, Madge is unfit to go to it. "A feverish cold in my head, I think," she says to Mrs. Henderson. "I suppose, after that bad attack, I wanted a more thorough change of air than I have got by coming from one part of the moor to another." And when she says this, Mrs. Henderson fully understands that the fever is in Madge's heart.

It is painful to see how the girl wanes after this—how she wearies over the very things that have been wont to interest and amuse her hitherto. The change is not sudden; but it is anything but slow. A fortnight has not elapsed since those miserable five minutes on the observatory, before the palpable decrease in Madge's bounding vitality startles Mrs. Henderson into making a plan, and wheedling Madge into the belief that she is essential to the proper carrying out of it.

"I am obliged to spend a couple of months in town, dear," she says to Madge, as carelessly as she can; "business takes me up, and I shall take the opportunity of getting good music lessons for Florry; you must come with us."

And after a slight opposition on Madge's part, the plan is put into execution, and she goes up to town the end of March.

The six weeks, at the end of which Philip has promised Olive and himself the dubious delight of another meeting, have elapsed, have nearly doubt-

led themselves, in fact, and his onerous duties chain Philip to his post.

And the weeks pass on, and he reads her letters, and thrills to their tone of suppressed tenderness, and longs to see her as he never has longed, and never will long, to see any other woman in this world. And while he is hesitating and procrastinating, in a way that is wicked by reason of its extreme weakness, a great crash comes, and whatever interest he may have created in Sir John's kindly heart is of no avail.

For Sir John Tollington has died of one of the hidden diseases that make no sign until they have gathered strength to kill without giving their victims time to make one struggle against them. And Philip Fletcher is again cast out of a situation, and again made to feel himself the veriest foot-ball of fortune.

CHAPTER XXXII

"THE ONLY SON OF HIS MOTHER."

It is a softly-brilliant May morning. Sunny reflections, undisturbed even by passing clouds, are lying in broad flashes of golden radiance on the white pavement of the streets and the tender young greensward of the parks. There is misery, and dimness, and dirt enough not very far from them, lurking in many an unsuspected spot. But from the Apsley House gate down to Kensington Gore, all looks happy, and bright, and clean, and prosperous. And it is between these two places that Mrs. Henderson and Madge have been walking up and down for an hour.

"The day is so much more beautiful than any we have had yet," Madge says, "that I should like to do something quite different with it from anything we have done yet."

"What would you like to do with it?"

"I don't know; we are two lone, lorn women, and so we must go on doing the cut-and-dried-things, I suppose. But if Mr. Henderson were here, I'd make him take me for a prowl."

"Where would you like to go, Madge? I can take you anywhere you like."

"No you can't—not where I want to go, I'm sure. I only know the bright side of London; now I want to see some of the 'haunts' that people shake their heads about; I want to go where there is misery and vice."

"You needn't stir a step for that," Mrs. Henderson interrupts.

"I know that," Madge says, softly and pathetically; "but I want to see some of the people who haven't money and friends, and social excitements, to make their trials endurable."

Mrs. Henderson keeps thoughtfully on her way in silence for a time. Presently she says:

"I can take you to a house the inhabitants of which have a heavy trial laid upon them; and you will see how bravely they bear it, though they have very little money, and very few friends, and certainly no social excitements, to make it endurable."

"I should like to go home and get some money first," Madge begins, and Mrs. Henderson seems embarrassed as she answers:

"It's not a case of that kind, dear," it's not destitution and want in a shocking and repulsive form; how shall I explain it? it's middle-class need and anxiety, Madge—things that you cannot possibly understand."

Madge nods her head sagaciously.

"I see," she says, "the father, the bread-winner, has fallen ill."

"It's a marvel that the bread-winner has not died," Mrs. Henderson says, almost passionately. Then she adds, more calmly, "But he is not the father of the family."

Madge gives an uneasy, interrogatory glance.

"You will not see him; he is away; that he is so, is half of their trial; but, Madge, you won't shrink from seeing his mother and sisters?"

And then Madge knows that she is being taken to see Phil's family.

It is a shock to Madge, for a moment, to see Phil's mother—the one she has learned to think of as Mrs. Henderson's contemporary as well as her friend—look so very old! Then she realizes that it is ill health and anxiety that have crushed the middle-aged woman into the semblance of old age. And instantly after this she realizes that the

kind eyes smiling at her, the kind voice welcoming her, are just like Phil's.

Presently—choosing it in the beautiful faith of its being the one topic in the world in which there cannot be pain to any human being—Mrs. Fletcher introduces the subject of her son.

"Chrissy goes to her brother to-morrow," she says, in a tone that tells a little of the enormous amount of calculation and resolution which has been brought to bear on the final decision.

"You have not heard from him, then?" Mrs. Henderson says, so sympathetically, that Madge looks up questioningly, startled, smitten with a sudden conviction that it is some "evil which has happened to Phil!" this trial which the Fletchers are bearing bravely.

Her whole face works with piteous emotion, and in the midst of her generous agitation she is horribly perplexed as to what she "shall do with a big tear that will roll down presently, and be an unbecoming inconvenience." His mother sees something of all this; for Madge is not one of the vapid, colorless, bloodless creatures who fail in portraying agitation; she does it only too vividly, only too well.

"My dear," Mrs. Fletcher says, won to familiar tenderness by the girl's sympathetic face, "you know my son a little, don't you? I suppose Mrs. Henderson has told you of our unhappiness; he is dangerously ill."

Madge is not the type of girl who gurgles herself off into hysterics, or falls senseless at the feet of the person nearest to her.

"The sun is in my face," she says, rising up with dazzled eyes and a dazzled brain, but speaking steadily and stepping firmly; then she seats herself by Mrs. Fletcher, and says, "tell me about it; yes, I know him very well."

A succession of quick, questioning glances are flashed from the mother and two sisters at Mrs. Henderson. They say plainly as words can say, "Why have you kept this from her; you seemed to feel keen interest." But Mrs. Henderson cannot make answer. She cannot tell them that she does not dare speak about a sorrow that is very near to her, to this daughter of her love, because she is in a mist as to why the girl never names him, and why he has withdrawn himself so utterly from them. She dares not tell them this; so she only says in reply to their half reproachful looks:

"It is a relief to me, it must be an intense one to you, that Chrissy has made up her mind to go to her brother: you will be spared the racking suspense you're suffering from now, at any rate."

"Yes, Chris has promised to write every day," Mabel says.

"And I shall send a telegram as soon as I get down to him," Chrissy adds. And then Madge screws up her courage to the point of asking:

"Is he at Delabourn still?"

"Oh, no!" Mrs. Fletcher says, shaking her head, regretfully; "was it there you saw him last?"

"No," Madge interrupts, hastily; "I never saw him there; the last time I saw him, he came to call on me with" (and now her face flames) "Miss Westcott."

"Ah, yes," Mrs. Fletcher resumes, "he was with them then; and very happy and comfortable he must have been with them, I'm sure, dear boy, from all I heard of their kindness; but there was an unpleasantness between the mother of his pupil and Phil; something happened at a ball that she didn't like, and she accused Phil of neglect; and he gave up his appointment—and poor fellow,"—there is a pause, and the mother is crying.

"And"—Madge says, suggestively and breathlessly:

"And he hasn't been fortunate enough to secure another as yet," Chrissy says, quietly. "Mamma, dear, don't give away; let us hope for better days; I feel we shall see some of the silver lining soon."

"The cloud has overshadowed us for a long time," Mrs. Fletcher says, trying to subdue her inclination to go on raining down these idle tears; "it's hard, terribly hard, to feel I can do nothing for my boy," she cries, catching hold of Mrs. Henderson's hand; "my dear, you're mercifully spared this—you'll never be a weight on a child you love."

"If I had a son like Phil, I should be glad to be dependent on him," Mrs. Henderson says, calmly, as the two daughters press round Mrs. Fletcher, and strive to soothe her out of her unwonted excitement. And then, as the mother lies back sobbing, broken down by her own words, and by the superb, loving sympathy that gleams in Madge's eyes, Mrs. Henderson takes up the thread of the story, and tells it briefly and succinctly.

"He came up to town and relinquished his charge of the lad who broke the looking-glass, and tried for one or two things in the city, but failed in getting either of them, for some reason or other. Then he went down to Ilfracombe, in answer to an advertisement for a secretary; got it, and set to work on his recognized duties by day, and on literary work at night; he did too much, poor boy, broke down, and has been dangerously ill for weeks."

Madge gasps, "Where is Miss Westcott?"

"I really cannot tell you," Mrs. Henderson says, coldly, for she is beginning to understand some things that have been mysterious to her hitherto. It grieves her to do so, but she can no longer doubt that her clever, keen-sighted, superior Madge has fallen into the error of being jealous of the overwhelming young colt who seated Phil with the freedom of a big boy.

The question seems altogether irrelevant to the Fletchers. What can it possibly matter to any of them where Miss Westcott is? It seems almost indifferent apathy in Miss Roden to ask them about an outsider, whom they neither know nor care about, while Phil, the best and dearest son and brother in the world, is ill and away from them—is dying and desolate, for aught they know.

But Madge is pertinacious.

"She knows of his illness, doesn't she?" she falters out. At the moment she feels capable of any amount of self-abnegation. She could almost bring herself to write a gentle letter of information concerning him to the girl whom she believes will be Phil's wife if he lives.

If he lives! And if he dies, she (Madge) will have to bear the bitter knowledge that another woman will have a closer right to mourn for him than she has. Nevertheless, feeling this thrillingly as she does, she says:

"She knows of his illness, doesn't she?"

"No—that is, not that we know of; why should they? Phil's connection with the family was broken off naturally when Ronald ceased to be his pupil."

Madge wonders vaguely for half a moment; then her perplexity words itself:

"You don't mean to say that his engagement was broken off when his pupil left him?"

"Why of course it was," Chrissy says, beginning to think that Madge is rather an obtuse young person. And then, as poor Madge ponders upon this enigma, Chrissy and her sister resume the important subject of the journey that is to be taken to-morrow.

"You see it hasn't been convenient to get summer things yet," Chrissy says, naturally offering the excuse that need usually makes for inadequate supplies. "We all thought a black alpaca the very best thing for a sick-room; so Mabel and I have run one up."

"Won't black alpaca be rather a gloomy dress?" Madge says, unthinkingly. She remembers Phil's ardent, genuine admiration for all the brightness with which she was wont to surround herself, and she throbs with pained pity for his weary eyes, if they are condemned to open with returning health on Chrissy in black alpaca.

"We have brightened it up with blue," Chrissy goes on explaining, and Madge thinks the dress must closely resemble a bruise in its worst stage. But she throws this minor consideration aside, in order to listen with absorbed attention to the detailed narration of Chrissy's contemplated plan of action.

"I shall tell them honestly at the hotel that a room on the top story will suit me very well, Chrissy declares, prudentially. "I shall be in it very little, wherever it is; for the few minutes I shall be out of Phil's room, it won't matter where I am; will it?"

She appeals in a flush of sisterly love, anxiety, and sympathy, to her audience, embracing them all, as it were. And Madge loses her head—loses

her self-command—loses her fortifying thoughts of Miss Westcott's rights, and responds for everyone with a gracious abandonment that only belongs to Madge:

"No, no, no, it won't matter to you, you love him so; and we will go down with you, won't we?" (appealing to Mrs. Henderson); "you shan't take that journey in despair, alone." And in this unpremeditated way, as much to her own surprise as to anyone else's, Madge stands forth as the friend of the family she has this day seen for the first time.

There would be something narrow, meagre, uncharitable, Mrs. Henderson feels, in checking such an outburst. So she assents with moderation.

"I shall be glad to go and get the latest news of Phil," she says; "and if you're as tired of town as I am, Madge."

"Tired? I'm sick of it."

"Then," the elder lady goes on, "Ilfracombe will be as good as any other place for you, and Chrissy will have a less wretched journey if we are with her; and altogether it seems to me to be the best arrangement we can come to."

And by the time Mrs. Henderson has said this, Madge is back bending over his mother, and saying:

"I'll send you a telegram the minute we arrive, and I'll write to you by every post. And you will feel glad that I am there, sharing all Chrissy's anxieties, won't you?"

How is it that the name falls so trippingly from her tongue? How is it that they all omit to marvel why it does so?

Without any effort, without any exaggerated display of feeling or sentiment concerning their sorrow, she has succeeded in identifying herself with their anticipations and dreads. And Chrissy goes on discussing the preparations she is making for her necessarily limited traveling wardrobe as freely as if Madge had been one of them for years.

The surroundings are all very prosaic the next morning, when Chrissy comes into the room to join the two friends who have called for her. But, prosaic as they are, there is powerful pathos in the quiet parting which ensues between the daughter and the mother—the poor, helpless mother, who has been accustomed for many years to lean solely on the son who is now stricken down out of her reach. In such a sorrow-bourn as this is, there is a poetry and dignity which no external accessories, however puerile or prosaic these may be, can destroy.

They make the journey—these three sisters of mercy unavowed—in the usual time and way, and reach the monster hotel just as the clanging gong gives the signal for the *table d'hôte*. "It's enough to clash him into his grave," Madge is feeling hotly; but she cools down to an almost death-like chill, as, in answer to Chrissy's eager question, the hall porter says that "the poor gentleman is past hearing that—or anything else."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

BROKEN DOWN!

THE Doctor, who has been in constant attendance on Phil from the commencement of the latter's illness, is coming down stairs hastily as Chrissy, stultified by the news abruptly rendered up to her by the hall-porter, stumbles up. As he passes her, in utter unconsciousness of her being the sister of his patient, words of life fall from his lips upon the ears of the three women who have just been crushed by the words of doom.

"Stop that infernal clanging, for mercy's sake! If Mr. Fletcher is roused from his first natural sleep, I'll charge the whole concern with manslaughter."

He is a large-framed, hard-faced, ungainly man; but to Madge he looks like an angel of mercy, as he catches the waiter, who is banging the gong, by the shoulder, and propels him several yards away from that instrument of horror. There is hope in his energetic manner; there is a promise of life in his wrath at the untoward row! In another moment the prettiest girl Dr. Vincent has seen for many a long day is lifting an eager, supplicating face to him, as she questions him about Philip.

He is an elderly man, one who has been accus-

tomed to witness every form and degree of anxiety that the probable approach of death, the destroyer, can cause. As he glances keenly down into the upturned face, he words his conviction:

"You are not his sister?"

"No, no; that was his sister you passed on the stairs," Madge answers, impatiently; and then Dr. Vincent scans her companion, Mrs. Henderson, and says, coolly, it seems to them both:

"Come into the saloon," and as soon as he has got them there, he cuts off all the rough edges of his manner, and adds, very kindly:

"Mr. Fletcher is no longer hopelessly ill." Then as Madge collapses under the suddenness of the relief, and subsides on to an ottoman, he says:

"That's right; take it quietly, and I'll tell you all I know about the case; it's the old story—incessant mental labor—incessant failure, incessant alternations of hope and despair; it's the history of the majority of literary men—the many fail, the one succeeds; the recognized term is the only one that expresses the nature of the disease—he's 'broken down.'"

They learn now, what they have never known before—that Phil had been a pressman and magazineist for years. That he had been successful as far as success goes, successful in a way that has stimulated him to go on laboring without cessation for the gain that was so needful. Then had come a time when the strain began to be painful, "when, if it could have been relaxed, all would have been well with him," the doctor thought; "and he has had some shock outside his professional career," Dr. Vincent adds, looking steadily at Madge, "and the result of it was that he broke down with a crash; but I see hope for him to-day; and now I'll go up and speak to his sister."

"And now it seems to me that supper would be better for you than moonlight, Madge," said Mrs. Henderson.

"I think so, too," Madge answers, promptly, though all her being revolts at the idea of food until she has heard how he takes the news of her being near him of her own choice and will.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

HOW OLIVE HEARS IT.

MADGE'S departure leaves a very dull blank in Olive Aveland's life. The hours, filled, as they are, with the thoughts of Philip, and the expectation, which is continually being disappointed, of seeing him—drag heavily along. Sometimes, when the burden of them becomes almost unbearable, the girl is half inclined to wish herself back in the uncongenial atmosphere of Barr and Battle's show-room. But when his letters come, breathing as they do, something of life in a higher social scale, she rejoices that she is free of it and its associations, and prizes her £100 a year, which enables her to keep herself apart, more than ever, for Philip's sake.

It is just about this time that Philip pays a visit to his relations in the little street in Chelsea, and hears, for the first time, of his cousin Phil's serious illness.

Philip from his boyhood has been wont to come to these relations of his, and inflict either his high spirits or his low spirits upon them whenever it has pleased him. Further, he has never thought it necessary to offer the smallest explanation as to the cause of either. And though, in their sympathetic hearts, they have often yearned to know the reason why, they have been taught to refrain "from bothering him," in a perfect way that does credit to his talent as a teacher.

It is a long, long time since they have seen him; and gloomy as he appears, they give him a cordial greeting, and then gulp out with loving pain—with loving reliance on his perfect sympathy also—the story of Phil's physical downfall. At the same time, with a delicacy he does not deserve, they abstain from making any mention of Madge Roden.

He has always been fond of his cousin, in a way; and now, at this juncture, he feels specially affected by the ill news concerning him.

"There is always some hitch or other in everything that concerns me," he says, complainingly. But they, Phil's mother and sister, forgive the selfishness of his complaint; for they notice that his face has blanched and his eyes reddened when he hears of Phil's extremity.

"Tell us about yourself, Philip," Mabel suggests; "don't think that our misery about Phil makes us careless of you, dear; it did grieve us so much when we saw Sir John Tollington's death! such a nice appointment as you found it, and appointments are so hard to get!"

She pauses suddenly, arrested in her sympathetic prosings by a queer expression of mingled amusement and embarrassment which flits over Philip's face.

"I'm not thinking about another appointment," he says, hesitatingly. "I've come to tell you something, which you'll be very glad to hear, I know. I am going to marry Lady Tollington; and you may congratulate me warmly, for I am a very lucky fellow, I can tell you."

"My dear Philip! I do indeed," bursts from them both. But somehow there is, unintentionally, more amazement than delight in their accents, for Philip's face belies his words when he says he "is a very lucky fellow."

Mabel presses him with questions presently, and he answers them with a fair amount of enthusiasm. "She looks quite young," he says, refraining from dating her ladyship, "very fair and delicate-looking; she's considered a remarkably pretty woman, and no one can doubt her attachment to me, for she will gain nothing by the move."

"She has a little money, then," Mrs. Fletcher remarks, in a tone of pleased surprise; "I am glad to hear it. Naval men, as a rule, can't leave their wives very well off."

"She has one of the finest properties in the Highlands," Philip says, trying not to let his voice ring with exultation, "besides a good income from funded property."

"When shall we see her, Philip?" Mabel asks, anxiously.

Philip winces.

"Well, to tell the truth she rather wishes the engagement to be kept quiet just at present. You see Sir John has not been dead the traditional twelve months that are conventionally devoted to widowed despair; and the world is so narrow-minded it won't remember how unnatural it would be for May to mourn for December in reality."

"Then you won't be married just yet?"

"In about a fortnight," Philip says, awkwardly. "When once we are married, everyone may hear of it; but we both rather wish to be spared the preliminary pulling to pieces."

"Then we shall not see Mrs. Philip Fletcher, I suppose, until you come back to town, after your bridal tour?"

Now it must be understood that though Philip's affection for these relatives of his does not equal theirs for him, he has a thorough and perfect respect for their integrity, their honorable conscientiousness, and their just judgment. He is desperately deficient in all these qualities himself, but he respects them in "his people." Further, he has a hearty, thoroughly, deep-seated contempt for his bride-elect. And so he has no desire to submit himself to the ordeal of their meeting with and sounding her.

Accordingly, he says:

"Town won't see us till next season, I fancy; then, of course, we shall look you up directly we arrive; we go west first, and then on the continent for a few weeks, and we shall try the winter at Auchtarroch."

"Is that the name of her place, Philip?" Mabel asks. And on the subject of the property Philip waxes eloquent. He can speak of Auchtarroch and the money that is in the funds without fear or shame.

"Well," Mabel says, when her cousin has made a ground-plan of the Auchtarroch property on the table, with books and reels of cotton, for their benefit, "I shall write and offer my cousinly congratulations to your bride the day you're married. I'll be one of the first to wish her joy under her new name, Philip!"

"She won't have a new name," Philip says, stumbling over his words, and upsetting the plan of Auchtarroch by pushing his chair back suddenly and jerking the table, "she will still keep her title—be Lady Tollington!"

"Oh! why? he was only a knight," Mabel says. "And I am sure the name of Fletcher is as good as that of Tollington," Mrs. Fletcher says, flushing rosy red at the intended slight to the family

patronymic. "I'm sure, if I were in your case, Philip, I would not agree to my wife bearing another man's name."

Philip gets up petulantly; it is always a temper-trying thing to have other people wording your feelings, when you have already proved yourself powerless to get those feelings attended to.

"Never mind his having been only a knight, Mabel; I think, aunt, that I am bound to concede something—such a trifle too—to a woman who gives so much and will get only my worthless self in return." Then he stoops to kiss them both and say "good-bye," and they understand pretty well that they are seeing the last of Philip—for he will want nothing more of them!

During the fortnight that follows this announcement, Lady Tollington, whose town circle is not a large one, drags her handsome young betrothed round it until he is giddy. But he reels along without a single demur. His time will set in when the vows are spoken, and the ring is on. Lady Tollington's airs of being a great enchantress will die a sudden death then, though he submits to them patiently enough now, for he has no intention of seeing Auchtarroch slip through his fingers, as the Moorbridge property did. His greatest trouble, as he is whirled along, is that Olive may see him.

At last, he has common humanity to cease writing to Olive. Purposely he has filled his two latest letters with misty allusions to "inevitable changes," and "stern necessities." But he has been unable (he is as great a coward as he is a liar) to tell her what the change is, and why he makes it. "She will hear it soon enough," he tells himself, and his false heart aches as he pictures that woman's anguish when she does hear it.

The marriage-day comes, and Lady Tollington, in the midst of all the excitement of dressing, has time to write one letter. Her dress is just as gray as a pearl! ("No one shall say I was absurd enough to be married a second time *in white*," she says to her maid), and this dress is covered with Mechlin lace, that falls about her in such graceful folds as to make her appear a very pretty woman when she practices "the glide" up the centre of Saint George's.

She is rather particular about this letter. She will not trust it to the post, but sends it by private messenger, just before she goes to the church. "And be sure he leaves word that I was on the point of starting to be married when I wrote it," she says, giving a final direction; "if one does a Christian thing, do it thoroughly."

The bridal pair need not be followed. The letter and its recipient are far more interesting.

Olive is sitting alone, alone as usual, alone with her own dreary thoughts, when that letter is handed to her. A golden monogram gleams at her from the envelope. A golden crest and quarterings, and motto, flame at her from the top of the epistle. A heavy perfume diffuses itself from the paper generally as she opens it, and reads:

"MY DEAR MISS AVELAND:—Since my late lamented husband's death, I have thought deeply on the subject of our mutual misunderstanding. The death of a friend purifies and clears the mind. I see now that we misjudged each other; and as I desire to be at peace with everyone on this happy day, I write to tell you that you have my best wishes for your future happiness and prosperity. Doubtless you will have heard from Philip of our engagement? he has, I know, a sincere friendship for you. We ratify this engagement this morning. I pen these lines just before starting for St. George's, Hanover Square. By the time you read this I shall be Philip Fletcher's wife. But if you write to congratulate me, address me as 'Lady Tollington.' I retain my title.

"Your sincere friend and well-wisher,

"JULIE TOLLINGTON."

She reads every word of it. More than this, she fully takes in the meaning of every word. And then for an hour!—Heaven help us, too many of us go through such hours as these. There is no need to write about them.

At the end of an hour she moves from the position she has never altered once during all the time and the words:

"She hath a devil," fall from her lips.

* * * * *

Some few days after this, as Olive is trying to make out what she will do with the rest of her life, Griffiths Poynter comes in.

"Of course it's you," she says, scarcely turning her head, but putting out her hand instantly (he notices that to welcome him; "of course, it's you, no one else would come at the right time."

"Have I come at the right time? Olive?"

"Oh, don't think that, *please*," Olive interrupts; "I mean that no one but you would come just when I was wanting to speak to a fellow-creature about what I am to do with my life."

"What you're to do with it!" he repeats, wonderingly.

"Yes—don't look perplexed; it's quite a common occurrence, I assure you, that a woman should feel the need of a definite plan of life while she lives, however little she may desire to live at all. Griffiths!" she adds, suddenly handing him the letter which Lady Tollington so carefully constructed on her bridal day. "Griffiths! read that; the man she speaks of is the man I have loved ever since I was capable of loving anyone outside the circle of my relations and my dolls; read that! and then tell me what I can do with what's left of my life."

He reads it in a paroxysm of pity, love, and indignation. And when he has finished it, he says—nothing.

"Why don't you speak?" she asks, presently.

"There is nothing left to say," he says humbly.

"I knew that. There is nothing left to say, and there is nothing left to do; and still I shall go on for perhaps another forty years; isn't it awful?"

Roused out of all the reticence he has been vowing to observe, Griffiths is goaded into saying:

"Forget the hound! how can you allow yourself to believe that you'll go on thinking about him?"

"Why don't you forget me?—why do you allow yourself to think so kindly of me still, that you keep on coming to try and comfort me, and do me good? why do you do it?—you're weaker than I am, for I never even pretended to love you, and Philip did—does love me with his whole heart."

"Oh, Olive!" he says pleadingly, "why will you speak these horrible truths? they're not truths either, for if you were married, dear, I'd never allow myself to think of you; while now I love you so, that I'll ask you, pray you, to let me take care of the life you value so lightly!"

"What a pity it is I can't do it!" she interrupts. "I know that it would be such a comfortable arrangement, and I know that I should always like you into the bargain, Griffiths; but I wouldn't marry a man I disliked even, much less you; and, after all, what is it?" she strives to say, calmly. "I shall only add one more to the long list of thrown-aside women; do believe me, it's all over."

"I do believe you," he says; and then he goes away to follow out his path in life, which will from this moment diverge widely from hers.

"At least, I have the satisfaction of knowing that I have been candid with him throughout," she thinks, as she hears his footsteps reverberating for the last time on the staircase; "but he is my last friend."

The woman who says these words is in the bloom of her youth, and has probably (as she has just suggested) a long lease of life before her still. As we look at her, her young head bent in dogged, faithful, despairing regret, let us remember, pitifully, that this life will in all human probability, be spent alone. For the only one whose advent could rejoice her can never come to Olive Aveland.

CHAPTER XXXV.

INTO THE SILENT POOL.

PHIL FLETCHER has advanced so far toward recovery as to be at the stage of being considered invalid enough to be the chief object of consideration to all his friends, and well enough to avail himself of their attentions. But this stage, so delightful to a woman, is one that speedily palls upon a man. In short, Phil is still sufficiently ill to

need a great deal of attention, and sufficiently well and true to his sex to be worried by it.

The old order of things, the order that had been established just before Madge and Phil went forth on that riding expedition, during which the scales fell from their eyes concerning each other, was re-established now, just as though it never had been interrupted. Once more Madge is back in her own home, regulating the daily round of life in Moorbridge House, as she always has regulated it since first she took the reins into her own hands; and once more Phil is the Hendersons' guest; and once more it is an understood thing that the occupants of the two houses are to be rarely apart.

Chrissy has gone back to her home duties, for Phil no longer has need of the sisterly care and devotion which Chrissy gave him, and which has made Chrissy very dear to Madge Roden. And so once more the two young people are necessarily thrown together a great deal; but still, wonderfully as he has rallied, Phil has evidently not quite recovered his former energy yet. He accepts the fact of being almost perpetually in Madge's presence with evident pleasure, but he does not take advantage of it. As he says himself sometimes to Mrs. Henderson, "All he desires now is to rest on his oars until he dare venture out to sea again." Of course, he says this openly in reference to the exertion of that brain-power which has failed him once, but it applies to other adventures also. Of all the shipwrecks which he dreads, a repetition of that one wherein he was so sadly battered on the observatory, would be the worst for him.

From the first moment of his convalescence at Ilfracombe, he has been accustomed to see Madge's graceful figure and Madge's blithe face about him. He is accustomed to be the recipient of dainty kindnesses and attentions from her that the others never think of rendering him. "It is her nature to be kind, and to try to give pleasure. If the pleasure she gives this man is a little too exquisite, she is not to blame; she merely obeys her instincts—shines and dazzles him; but though he is dazzled, he is not going to presume on his privileges again." He tells himself these truths often, and his heart forbodes that when the exquisite pleasure ceases, a more exquisite pain will be his portion.

He has heard from Mrs. Henderson of Madge's anxiety and sympathy for him and with his people, when the news of his illness first reached her. But Mrs. Henderson has been careful to tell the tale calmly, and in a matter-of-course way. "It was too kind of you both to come down with my sister," Phil had said, when the recital came to a close. And Mrs. Henderson had merely answered, "My dear boy, considering all things, I could have done no less, and Madge couldn't have remained in London without me."

Phil was not in the mood at this time to take advantage of, or even to be made hopeful by, anything like encouragement on the subject of his love. But it did dishearten him to hear this solution given of the sweet mystery Madge's being there had been to him. It disheartened him so, that he refused Mrs. Henderson's invitation to go back to Halsworthy with her. He knew himself that "it would be useless for him even to put his fate to the touch again; he had no intention of ever doing so; still, to have the inutility of anything of the kind pointed out to him was hard—and was unnecessarily hard."

Nevertheless, when the time came, he did go back to Halsworthy, where he is this gorgeous August day, reading a letter he has just received from his cousin Philip.

A fortnight ago Phil heard of his cousin's marriage, from one of his sisters; but up to the present time he has said nothing about it. He has an undefined idea that Madge Roden is nothing to him—never can be anything to him—he shrinks (not unnaturally) from the thought of seeing her pained by another man's marriage.

But this letter makes him comprehended clearly that he can shun the subject no longer. Philip tells his cousin in an affectedly easy way (Phil almost fancies he sees the falsity of that ease in the wavering strokes of the pen that has, palpably, not been the pen of a ready writer) that "Lady Tollington has expressed such a desire to see that part of Exmoor that he (Phil) does not feel justi-

fied in permitting any associations of his own to thwart her." "Look out for us, therefore, in a day or two," he concludes; "I know there is a decent inn in Halsworthy—and I know that Miss Roden is far too sensible a girl to imagine that there is anything like a vaunt in my coming."

Phil is sitting on a chair on the Hendersons' lawn, as he reads this; and just as he comes to a conclusion, Mrs. Henderson strolls slowly out from the dining-room window and comes across to join him.

"Your correspondence absorbs you this morning, Phil," she says. And then she ventures on to a topic that has never been broached since his illness. "Are you behindhand with 'copy,' poor boy, and are they worrying you?"

"Oh, no!" Phil answers, quite cheerfully, in a way that makes Mrs. Henderson's heart thump with relief. "I got into harness some days ago, and—there's not such a demand for me," he adds, with a laugh, "that I need burst my brains to supply it."

"Got into harness some days ago—wasn't that rather soon—wasn't it rash?"

She asks it with a ring of such genuine anxiety in her voice, that Phil, instead of answering "Oh, no! I don't think so," (in a way that half admits the accusation, as people usually do who are charged with rashness in a friendly way,) says:

"What makes you say that?—you're not a croaker from an empty sense of civility?"

"No, I am not; I mean it thoroughly. I put it to your common sense, Are you not rash in flinging yourself into arduous brain-work again before your brain has properly recovered its spring and balance?"

"I hope not," he says, gravely; "I understand what you mean, and fear, now; don't think me idly rash; I know that it has been touch and go with me. Mrs. Henderson, the pressure upon me for the last few months has been intolerable; it is well for me that I gave way physically; it was inevitable that there should be a crash somewhere; you see, I fell into the whirl of feeling that, if I paused for a moment—if I was not at the wheel constantly—there would be wreck and confusion in my life; and not in my life only, but in the lives of others; that was one cause."

"And there was another?" Mrs. Henderson interposes.

"There was; but I'm not going to talk of that now—don't distress yourself about me. I'm out of the whirl; the enforced inaction and quiet of the last few weeks have wrought the good work of teaching me that I shall do more if I go at it coolly than if I work at white heat; but work I must—you know that."

Having got him on the topic, she, with a woman's adroitness, keeps him to it, till she has got him to express his regret that he should ever have been led into the folly of relinquishing his clerkship and trusting wholly to literature and tutoring for a livelihood. And, at last, he adverts to another folly.

"It wasn't disappointed ambition that made me lose my head eventually," he says; "I made a mistake one day when I was here last, and Miss Roden acted the part of a true friend, and told me of my fault and folly in a way that in curing pretty nearly killed."

"Madge told me she had made a mistake in imagining you to be engaged to Miss Westcott," Mrs. Henderson says, quietly. Then she resolves that she will not add another ingredient to the potent charm of that statement, but will let it seethe and seethe in his mind, unadulterated with any minor matter. So she turns from the topic with easy determination, just as he feels that it would be Paradise to pursue it.

"You waved your letter at me when I came up in a way that made me think there was something in it that I was to hear?"

"So there is, Philip has married Lady Tollington."

"That woman whose husband died two or three months ago?"

"The same. I heard of it from Chrissy a fortnight ago, but I didn't care to speak of it; and here's worse to follow; he writes to me himself now, saying that they are coming here in a few days; how will Miss Roden take it?"

"Madge is too well bred to show her contempt

for them; you needn't be alarmed, either on their account or hers."

"It's the woman making him come—I'm sure of that," Phil says, waxing wroth; "I can't stop them—the inn is open to man and beast; Miss Roden will be justified in thinking lowly indeed of the Fletcher family."

"She never will identify you with your cousin in any way, be sure of that," Mrs. Henderson says. And then she adds, impressively, "The difference between you two men was clear to Madge at a time when it must have given her pain—at a time when she was paying the penalty of my mistake and her own; don't distress yourself about what Madge will feel in seeing your cousin."

There is more satisfaction for Phil after this, in his ride with Madge Roden. There is more satisfaction for him in the frank, unaffected way in which she shows her pleasure in his society, and her joy in his rapidly returning health. These bitter words of her that had rankled in his mind so long, had been uttered under a delusion! She had believed him to be engaged to great, good-natured Miss Westcott, and the belief had made her bitter. There is no longer pain and humiliation to Phil in the memory of them, now that he knows the cause of them.

She hears the news of Philip's marriage with Lady Tollington, with an amount of incredulity that staggers Phil for a while. He cannot help feeling that her unwilling belief—her surprise—her evident distress—betokens some smouldering fire of regard for Philip. But presently she undeceives him.

They are alone, riding through the blooming purple heather, as she does it, on the free wild border of the moor. As they pull up on the brow of the slope, and look away over the wide expanse of undulating ground, the desire to be as open as the scene possesses her.

"Shall I tell you why I am heart-sore and horrified to hear of Philip's marriage with Lady Tollington?" she asks, laying her whip on his arm to command his attention.

"Heart-sore!" The words hurt him.

"Yes—so heart-sore, and hurt! Oh, Phil, I don't think even you will understand how I dread what is before me! I shall have to tell this news to some one else who may die of it."

Her own voice melts into tears as she says this. And then clearly, sadly, and mercifully, she tells him the story of Olive Aveland and his cousin.

They grow very sympathetic and confidential over the plans for the preservation of everybody's peace of mind, and finally Madge says:

"I tell you what it is, Phil! as soon as Lady Tollington (disgusting of a woman not to call herself by her husband's name) is tired of exhibiting her last purchase here—as soon as ever they are gone, you must go up and bring Olive down to me; she shall see more of Griffiths Poynter; she shall learn how much better he is worth living for than Philip is worth dying for."

This is the last definite plan they make this afternoon, before going home. The next morning's post brings a letter that upsets it altogether.

Madge is the recipient of this letter, and with a sorrowful face and a throbbing heart she takes it to Mrs. Henderson and Phil at once.

"Read it," she says, sobbing; "what shall we do?"

The letter is from Olive. It is very simple, very short, very eloquent of the girl's smarting condition.

"DEAR MADGE,—You have told me often to come to you in any trouble. My trouble is come now, in the shape of the feeling that I'm utterly desolate. I shall be at Moorbridge House to-morrow, if you will have me. I'm not dying, but I have neuralgia in the soul and mind and heart. Will you have me?"

"Your affectionate OLIVE."

"She knows it," Phil says; "you will be spared that; you will not have to tell her; she knows it already."

"But she may see him here—don't you see the new misery?" Madge cries.

"She must not see him; we must all combine to avoid that complication," Phil says, quickly.

"I should think that a word to Phil, when he

comes, will be sufficient to send him straight away again."

"It won't be sufficient to send Lady Tollington straight away again," Madge says, with an impatient shake of her head. "I have heard something of her from Olive already; she is a clever fool."

"One thing is certain; as we don't know where they are, we must wait until they come here, to make an appeal to their better feelings, if they have any; besides, let us hope that we are magnifying the evil; Olive when she comes under our influence, may be persuaded to find her hero in Griffiths Poynter," Mrs. Henderson says, hopefully. But Madge only shakes her head more despondingly than before; she has heard Olivespeak of Philip, and the hope Mrs. Henderson has put forth does not lighten Madge's breast for a moment.

It is late in the afternoon of the day following this on which this discussion took place, when Olive reaches the haven of peace she has selected. Madge meets her at the little road-side hostelry, where the coach horses bait, and carries her back in the little sung brougham to Moorbridge House. There is nothing wanting in the tender thoughtfulness of Madge's manner. There is nothing wanting in the hearty, fond welcome she gives this poor, sad girl, who is so pitifully conscious of her weakness, and so utterly powerless to combat it. "You know that he is married!" are the first words Olive finds breath to utter. And Madge knows that she can say nothing!—nothing that will, by any chance, alleviate this woman's pain.

Olive soon learns that Phil, that cousin Phil "of whom in the old days she heard so much, but whom she has never seen, is staying at the Hendersons'. And she soon learns something else concerning him, though Madge says nothing more. "Her hero has come," poor Olive thinks, after looking wistfully at her bright-faced friend for a few moments. And then she feels she would like to see him.

"Madge, dear," she says, "let us walk down to Mrs. Henderson's—dear, kind, Mrs. Henderson—I want to see her as soon as possible."

Madge assents; indeed, she rather catches at the idea. It is well that Olive should go there this evening, for after to-morrow her progress through the village might be an unsafe one, and liable to painful interruption. Accordingly, they put on their hats, and white-faced Olive wraps a silver-gray cloud over her shoulders and the thick, dull black silk dress (which had been of great efficacy in "showing off" various splendors at Barr and Battle's, and which she now wears in memory of the uncle who has left her £100 a year), and they saunter slowly down through the grounds to the village. Then they go through the village street a little more hurriedly, and presently find themselves in the Vicarage garden, where Mrs. Henderson greets them with the words:

"My girls, I was coming up to you with Phil; why did you drag Olive out to-night, Madge?"

It seems to Madge that Mrs. Henderson has some communication to make, that she is trying to send a telegram from her own eyes to Madge's mind. But bewildered Madge can make nothing of it. Olive has the eye of a falcon, and sees presently what is going on.

"Do you want to speak to Madge alone?" she asks, abruptly, and Mrs. Henderson is so overwhelmed by the suddenness of the question, and by many other things, that she says, "Oh, no; I was only afraid you were sitting in a draught."

"And didn't like to let me see that you thought I required care. My dear Mrs. Henderson, if I heard anyone discuss the size of my coffin, and the quality of my shroud, it would have no effect on me."

"But this is morbid, Olive."

"Morbidity may be; I only know it's the case; it would have no effect on me, for I don't think for a moment that I shall die for many a long year. I've a weary time to go through yet; I am young and strong, just as strong as I was when I was happy; my pale face means nothing; I am really strong. I may sit in this draught with impunity."

There is something in the quiet recklessness of the girl's tone and manner that actually hurts those who are listening to her. For diversion's sake, Madge says:

"Where is Phil? I have told Olive that he is here."

"Gone out," is the brief answer.

"Let us go on your lovely lawn," Olive says, rising up and passing out through the window; "how exactly it all is like what it used to be when I was here before, and my sorrow was sleeping. Oh, what sense and mercy there is in those words, 'When sorrow sleepeth, wake it not.' Mine has been roused up effectually; and oh, dear me, how many weary years it will have to be awake—I am so young and strong."

Her words are not such as incline one to answer them. Therefore her two companions keep silence till they find themselves on the lawn. But Madge has managed to slip her hand through Olive's arm, and give her a pressure that is as full of human love and sympathy as the most eloquent words could be.

"Look at my *Osmunda regalis*," Mrs. Henderson says, pointing out a flourishing group of the royal monster fern. "That dull, silent pool that I hated so much when I came here first, is turning out the most ornamental spot in my garden, now that it is fringed with these ferns. I used to be so dreadfully afraid that my children would tumble in; but, now they're growing up, its banks are the favorite family resort."

"So I should think," Olive says, "judging from the well-worn appearance of the rustic chairs." And then they all seat themselves on these chairs, which are placed on the smooth, elastic turf, close to the edge of the pond, and amuse themselves with looking at the reflection of the stars as they flash out in the motionless, dark waters.

"It's sweet enough to induce one to sit here all night," Madge says; "nevertheless, as soon as Phil comes in, he must be our escort home."

Meanwhile the Halsworthy Inn is in a state of chaos. Lady Tollington and Mr. Fletcher have arrived, with their man and maid; and these two are making life a horrible burden to the flustered landlady, by their dissatisfaction. Maddened by their complaints and suggestions, the worthy woman forgets her cunning, and over-seasons some viands, and under-cooks others, and finally serves up a complete failure of three courses to a hungry, tired, and irritable pair.

"I shall not stay in this hole to be starved," Lady Tollington says, in fiery tones, as the last remnants of the ill-starred feast vanish from the table.

"The sooner we go, the better I shall be pleased," her husband rejoins; "you may do me the favor of remembering that I was opposed to coming here from the first."

"Absurd sentimentality, and false too," Lady Tollington says, in a white rage, rising and going to the window. "You're weak enough; I know that; but I am not going to believe that you're weak enough to have any feeling left for this Miss Roden, who threw you off like an old glove directly she was tired of you, and had seen your cousin."

As Philip does not answer her she is about to turn round with an unmistakable scowl on her fair, tired-looking face. But before she can do it, her glance is arrested by the sight of Olive Aveland and another young lady walking down the street. She guesses at once that they are going to the Vicarage, to see that Mrs. Henderson of whom Philip has made mention. And she resolves that she too, and Philip, shall follow with little delay.

Accordingly, a smile is the mask she wears, instead of a scowl, when she does turn round.

"Philip," she begins, with the fawning air she can adopt at a moment's notice, "forgive my petulance; hunger is gnawing every bit of the courtier out of me; accept the *amende* I am going to make: take me to see your friend, Mrs. Henderson?"

Philip has nothing reasonable to urge against this request. He has not seen that graceful figure in the gray cloud; therefore he infinitely prefers the idea of going and having a pleasant evening at the Vicarage with Mrs. Henderson and his cousin Phil, and possibly Madge Roden, to that of spending the evening alone with his spouse in a dull village inn. One very soon comes to the end of vivacious, vain Lady Tollington. And having

come to the end of her, one has not the faintest desire to retrace one's steps.

Accordingly, when the stars come out and jewel the skies, Lady Tollington puts on a youthful hat, and a "real cashmere," and Philip attends her with a careless indifference as to what will happen next, that will never be his portion again.

The talk between the three women on the border of the silent, black pool often flags; but they sit on contentedly, for there is a certain pleasurable sense of rest to each one of them in being together in this way. Madge is by far the most silent of the three, and when she does speak it is only to wonder "Why Phil has not come back yet." When she has expressed this wonder several times, she feels that an explanation is due to Olive. "Phil and I are going to be married soon," she says; and then she goes on to inform Olive that as he is going to the Bar, his time must be principally spent in London. "And Aunt Lucy won't be dull at all, because, luckily, Phil's mother and sisters have agreed to come and live at Moorbridge House; and we shall run down whenever Phil can spare time, for he won't let me be away from my kingdom long."

"Dear Madge," Olive says, affectionately, "how good it is when the real Happy Prince comes at last, instead of at first." And then she goes on to talk freely with Madge of the latter's future, until it seems to both her hearers that her own heart has grown lighter.

The stars keep on breaking out on the surface of the dark pool in great beauty each moment, and the reflection of a splendid one gets broken and shattered into a myriad diamonds by the light ripple that is caused by the movement of the big fronds of the royal fern. In order to watch it, Olive draws her chair nearer and nearer to the edge, and Mrs. Henderson comes out, and they are all as much interested in the heavenly bodies as if there were no such things as false and absent lovers in the world.

Presently, through the still night air the parlor-maid's voice comes to them, saying, "My mistress and the young ladies are out on the lawn, sir;" and now figures loom tall as they approach them in the starlight, and presently Philip Fletcher is in their midst, saying:

"I have brought my wife to introduce to you, Mrs. Henderson."

It is all so sudden, it is so much like an awful nightmare, from which, if she moves, she may free herself, that Olive does move, and does free herself, poor thing.

Forgetful of the water that is behind her, as she has turned her head to see him coming, she rises, steps back, and then there is a dull clashing sound in the pool, and Olive is no longer one of them.

Cry upon cry is raised, for the pool is known to be terribly deep, and the stars are twinkling confusedly on its broken surface. Philip Fletcher has not seen the face of the woman who has disappeared, but in the midst of the panic he only is prompt. He has sprung in before he knows what he is springing after.

Vain assistance is rendered to him by those who rush frantically round the margin, declaring that they are sure "she is rising there." When she does rise, it is far from the spot anyone has indicated; and when Philip, nearly exhausted himself, bears her to the bank in his arms, it is a dead face that the stars look down upon.

"Such an awful thing to have happened on our wedding-tour," Lady Tollington says; "quite like a bad omen. I'll never come near the West of England again." Lady Tollington looks quite old as she says this to Mrs. Henderson, a day or two after the occurrence—old, and worn, and disappointed. And Mrs. Henderson, who does not know all the facts of the case, pities the living wife, who knows that she will never have a place in her husband's heart, more than she does the dead love, who has done with all the toil and endeavor now.

"For after all," as Madge says to Phil, the day before their own marriage, "he came to her at the last; she knew (I like to feel sure of that) that he was trying to save her."

[THE END.]

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